

No, I do not own the Harry Potter franchise, though I do own copies of all the books and films. The people who do own the Harry Potter franchise are JK Rowling, Bloomsbury, Warner Bros. and a few other publishers. Thank you to JKR for letting us play about in the sandbox of the Wizarding World.

Well, here it is, my second Harry Potter story. It's a "Harry is the unloved brother of the BWL", though unusually for this kind of story, it takes place after the characters finish Hogwarts.

Anyway, enjoy!

Harry: The Forgotten Brother.

Chapter 1: Dumbledore's Puzzle

Arnold Potter, the Boy-Who-Lived, the Chosen one, aged thirty-two, Hogwarts graduate; Gryffindor, class of '98, the one the wizarding world placed its hopes in to defeat the Dark Lord Voldemort, was dead. Port-keys had brought his severed limbs to several locations throughout Britain; his head to his parents, Lily and James, an arm to the Weasley ancestral home; the Burrow, another arm to the Headquarters of the Order of the Phoenix; Number 12, Grimmauld Place. The torso, with a gaping hole in it, was delivered to the Great Hall of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry during dinner. One leg arrived in the main atrium of the Ministry of Magic. The other leg arrived at the flat of Arnold's long-time best friend Ronald.

The hole in the torso was where his heart had been ripped out. It, along with his testicles, arrived in Arnold's own flat, to torment his fiancée, Ginny.

Panic was widespread throughout the wizarding community. This war had been going on for around seventeen years, with neither the light side nor the darkness giving an inch.

Voldemort was powerful, but with Albus Dumbledore, Alastor Moody, Amelia Bones, Rufus Scrimgeour, Cornelius Fudge and Arnold presenting a united front, the self-styled greatest dark lord of all time had been unable to make any serious bid for control.

That did not stop the attacks, however. In fact they were quite regular. But the leaders of light were always there to provide backup.

Now, though, one of them, supposedly the only one who could kill Voldemort, was dead himself, and by Voldemort's hand, no less.

And the fickle wizarding public wanted someone to blame. And the remaining leaders had promptly turned on each other, each insisting that it was all the others' fault, but not their own.

Now the light side was dividing.

The Order of the Phoenix had split into two groups; the larger group were the ones who had, for a long time now, become slowly more disillusioned with the way Dumbledore ran the organisation. This group contained Lily and James Potter, Remus Lupin, Sirius Black, Nymphadora Tonks, Hestia Jones, Kingsley Shacklebolt and most (but not all) of the remaining Weasley clan, amongst others. And it was this group that now sided with Alastor Moody.

The smaller group consisted of the Dumbledore loyalists; including Minerva McGonagall, Molly Weasley, Ron Weasley, Severus Snape, Elphias Doge and Dedalus Diggle, amongst others. Their numbers were topped up, at least in the political circuit, by a couple of Wizengamot members, and one or two Ministry personnel, with the majority of the teachers at Hogwarts on their side too.

Cornelius Fudge and Amelia Bones seemed to have split the rest of the Wizengamot members between them; with Fudge taking those of big name, yet mostly incompetent, such as Dolores Umbridge. Amelia, on the other hand had the likes of Augusta Longbottom, Griselda Marchbanks and Tiberius Ogden in her camp.

Amelia also had the loyalty of the majority of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, of which she was in charge. Certainly the run-of-the-mill Magical Law Enforcement officers were behind her one hundred percent. The Hit Wizards too, for the most part, were loyal to her, or at least the sub-section of the department was; you never could tell with those blokes where their loyalties truly lay, though with the highest bidder, would not be a bad guess.

The Aurors, however, seemed to have chosen to ignore Amelia and instead sided with Head Auror Scrimgeour, who had little backing elsewhere.

And that was how the problems began. Those loyal to the Dark Lord began to worm their way into the now separate ranks of the light side, particularly the Wizengamot, and the sub-departments of the DMLE.

And it was this that led to Albus Dumbledore sitting down in his office, going over every scrap of information about Arnold Potter that he could find.

Granted, he knew most of what there was to know, being the grand manipulator that he was.

But there had to be something that would help him to achieve his 'Greater Good'.

Rumours were that Ginny Weasley, Arnold's now pre-marital widow, had been pregnant at the time of Arnold's death. Was there a child now on the cards? A child who could take Arnold's place?

Dumbledore spent a good hour pondering that line of thought, before realising that even if there were a child, he did not have access to it. Molly Weasley, Ginny's mother, may have been on Dumbledore's side, but her husband, Arthur, was firmly in Moody's camp, as were James and Lily, Arnold's parents.

There would be little Dumbledore could do on that front. Of course, as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, it would only take him to pull a few strings here and there, and he could get the child into its maternal grandmother's custody, where he could access it. However, such an action would cause untold amounts of public outcry against him; something he could afford little of.

It would also upset the older families. Many of them may not like Arthur Weasley, or James Potter, but both had more right over the upbringing of the child than Molly Weasley would; it was just the way of things in the wizarding world.

And it was pretty obvious that the others, particularly Fudge and Scrimgeour, would use that to turn more people against him.

No, trying to take the child, if there was one, would not be a smart move.

Nor would attempting to get Arnold's younger sisters, Charlotte and Isabella on his side work.

He had no idea what to do.

Then, after three weeks of searching through old notes and books, and wracking his brains, Albus Dumbledore remembered something; something that many had long ago forgotten.

The brother.

Of course; Arnold Potter had had a brother.

The boy had even attended Hogwarts; a Hufflepuff, if Dumbledore remembered correctly.

What was the name, again? It began with the letter 'H'. Was it Herbert? Or Henry? Maybe Harold? Hugo, perhaps? Horace? No, surely not. Harley, then? Or maybe it was Harrison? Hector? Heath? Howard? Perhaps Hudson or Harvey?

Yes that was it; Harvey Potter.

Getting up from his desk, Dumbledore made his way over to the one of the filing cupboards and opened it.

A quick swish of his wand brought up the files of those who graduated in 1998 and he began leafing through.

...Katherine MacDougal, Morag MacDougal, Ernie Macmillan, Draco Malfoy, Jennifer Malone, Rebecca Malone, Kellah Mitchell, Libby Moon, Theodore Nott, Pansy Parkinson, Padma Patil, Parvati Patil, Sally-Anne Perks, Arnold Potter, Sienna Rivers, Seren Roper, Bradley Runcorn, Zacharias Smith, Ryan Spinks...

Hang on.

Dumbledore double-checked.

Nope, definitely not. There was no file between Arnold Potter and Sienna Rivers, as there should have been.

Dumbledore could think of only one reason why the file of Arnold's brother was not amongst those of his year mates.

As these folders were all updated until the time the student graduated, the absence of a name meant that the student in question had not completed their education with the rest of the year group.

Why?

Dumbledore could not recall the lad getting expelled, in fact, he could not recall ever hearing of any incidences of the lad getting in trouble.

Had he died? No, surely not. Dumbledore would have known. The whole world would have known; he was Arnold Potter's brother.

Perhaps he had been held back a year? Yes that had to be it.

Another wave of his wand, and Dumbledore called up the files of those who had graduated in 1999.

...Elizabeth Manning, Patricia Marks, Eric Midgen, Russell Newton, Debora O'Flaherty, Joanne Pittman, Malcolm Preece, David Preston... damn!

The lad could not have possibly been held back two years, surely? Perhaps he got moved up a year? But then how often did that happen with a Hufflepuff? Ravenclaws, occasionally; Gryffindors and Slytherins, rarely. But a Hufflepuff?

Well, there was an easier way to sort this.

Another wave of his wand, and Dumbledore had the files arranged as those sorted in 1991.

...Draco Malfoy, Jennifer Malone, Rebecca Malone, Kellah Mitchell, Liberty Moon, Theodore Nott, Pansy Parkinson, Padma Patil, Parvati Patil, Sally-Anne Perks, Arnold Potter... Bingo.

Here it was.

Odd, though, the boy's name was written as H. Potter? How strange.

What was more, rather than the usual, elegant calligraphy style used on the other files, the name was just scribbled in, as though done by someone in a rush.

Was the boy an unexpected arrival?

Dumbledore himself certainly could not remember a second Potter son ever being mentioned before he turned up at Hogwarts.

How strange.

Finally taking the file out of the mass of others, Dumbledore noticed something else strange; the file was very thin. Arnold Potter's file in front of it was very bulky, filled with appraisals, merits, and a few detention forms, as well as countless extras.

H. Potter's file, meanwhile, contained merely the basics. The first page was the same as all the others; a small fact sheet about the student the file represented. The usual, except in the way it was filled out;

Surname: Potter (?)

First name(s): H.

Father: James Potter (?)

Mother: Lily Potter (nee Evans) (?)

Date of Birth: -

Place of Birth: -

Nationality: White English (?)

Blood Status: Half Blood (?)

House: Ravenclaw

Allergies: -

Well that was not too informative, and what was there seemed speculative. At least it corrected Dumbledore: the lad had been in Ravenclaw, not Hufflepuff.

He turned over to the medical history sheet. It was blank.

No recorded trips to the Hospital Wing whilst at Hogwarts, and apparently no visits to St Mungo's Hospital either before his time at Hogwarts, or during it.

How peculiar.

There seemed to be nothing else in the file other than the again standard end-of-term reports.

According to the sheets for the end of the autumn, winter and spring terms of first year, the boy was mediocre at best. Why then was he in Ravenclaw?

His end-of-year scores, however, told a much different tale. In fact, those scores pointed to someone who ought to be moved up a year ahead of his brother. But he had not been so.

Second year was much the same; the teachers reported him as mediocre, whilst the end-of-term exams showed him to be something of a genius.

And third year, well, whilst the teachers' reports said the same (almost word for word), the third year exam results pointed, not only to a student who desperately needed to advance, but also to a potential prodigy in charms, transfiguration, potions and defence against the dark arts. His ancient runes, herbology and arithmancy results were none-too-shabby, either.

A note slipped in by Madam Hooch said that the lad had tried out for the Quidditch team in this year. He had failed to get a spot.

Then there was fourth year.

Dumbledore remembered that year well; Arnold Potter had been illegally entered into the tri-wizard tournament, events had quickly spiralled beyond anyone's control, and eventually resulted in the return of the Dark Lord Voldemort.

And looking through this file now, the school year in question held something else that had remained unnoticed and insignificant until now.

The teacher's end of term reports all read pretty much the same as they had over the previous years. This time, however, their comments were backed up by the end of term exams.

Oh, he had passed them all, but only barely.

Gone were the signs of a brilliant mind. Gone were the signs of a gifted student. Gone were the signs of a child prodigy in four subjects.

Was there an incident, perhaps, that damaged this brilliant mind? No, the medical information sheet was blank. What then? It was almost like the lad had given up. But why?

Perhaps a more important question was why there was nothing more in the boy's school record after the end-of-year results for fourth year. It seemed like the boy had left, but there was no form, or anything else to state that he had withdrawn from the school. There were no transfer notes to say that he had switched schools, as six other students had done following the Tri-Wizard Tournament. There was no expulsion form, so he had not been expelled. And there was no death certificate, which would have been put in the file if he had died.

What happened to him, then?

And why did Dumbledore struggle to remember him? He had no problems remembering each and every face that had passed through Hogwarts' doors in all the time he had worked at the school, so why did he struggle so to remember this one student?

Especially when this one student was a fairly important person; he was the brother of the prophesised Chosen One, after all. The Potter family had been featured thousands of times in wizarding publications over the past three decades, why could Dumbledore not remember one of them?

Perhaps a trip to the library was in order. Madame Pince kept copies of the Daily Prophet, The Evening Prophet, Witch Weekly, The Quibbler, Challenges in Charming, Seeker Weekly, The Practical Potioneer, Transfiguration Today and countless other wizarding periodicals for research purposes, and her collection ran right back to when each periodical was first published.

If Dumbledore could find any information on the mysterious second-son of the Potters, it would be there.

So there you go. What do you think? I'm not sure as to the pairing of this story yet. I know Hermione will play an important role alongside Harry, but whether they become a couple or not is still up in the air. I know that I am posting this with the two characters listed being Harry and Hermione, but, as so many of us, including myself, often forget, those little 'character selection' buttons we use to search for stories relate to who the story mainly focuses on, not the pairing, sorry.

Chapter 2: A Face in the Shadows.

Albus Dumbledore was growing ever more frustrated. He had spent four whole days going through one copy of the Daily Prophet after another, hoping that he would find some small clue about the second son of the Potter family. Photograph after photograph, interview after interview and still nothing to suggest that a son other than Arnold Potter had survived that fateful Halloween night of 1981.

He had had one small bit of success though; in the family announcements section of an issue of the Daily Prophet dated August 1st, 1980. It read.

James and Lily Potter and their family and friends are proud to announce the arrival of twin boys Harold James Potter, and Arnold Samuel Potter.

That was all that there was in that addition, but it had prompted Dumbledore to look through the papers that came out during the next few days and, sure enough, on the 3rd August, 1980, James Potter himself had given an interview to the Prophet about the new arrivals to his family. More important than that, however, was the photograph that took up half of the page.

The photograph showed James and Lily Potter, happily smiling, James with his hands on Lily's shoulders, Lily holding not one, but two babies; one in each arm.

So the other son had existed, and was made known to the world, that much Albus Dumbledore could now prove.

Unfortunately three days after giving that interview, the Potters had begun their time in hiding due to the Prophecy regarding Lord Voldemort.

And apart from a few hastily scribbled out school forms, there seemed to be absolutely no evidence that Harry James Potter had survived Lord Voldemort's attack at Godric's Hollow.

Dumbledore took off his half-moon glasses and rubbed his eyes wearily before casting a glance over the piles of newspapers and magazines next to him; the Quibbler, Witch Weekly, Teen Witch Weekly...

Dumbledore frowned and shook his head in dismay before replacing his glasses. He really was much too important of a man to be rummaging through old news articles like this, on the off chance that just one of them would give some tiny little clue about the mysterious brother of Arnold Potter. He would have to get someone else to do it.

Yes, that sounded like a good plan; he would get someone else to do it. In fact, forcing Severus into looking through thirty-two years' worth of Teen Witch Weekly articles on the Potter family would be good for a bit of fun, if nothing else.

Good Merlin how Albus loved abusing his positions of authority over others.

Severus Snape was having a very bad day. First those sons and one daughter of those damnable Weasley twins had somehow slipped something in his morning cup of tea and resulted in his sporting bright green hair for the duration of his morning lessons. Then in the afternoon one of the little snot-rag first years, Frank Longbottom II had blown up the cauldron he and his partner were brewing in, resulting in half the glass being covered in forgetfulness potion, and none of the students who were hit by the stuff could remember a thing that had happened for up to an hour before the explosion or up to two hours after.

And now that blasted Headmaster had him riffling through thirty-plus years-worth of Teen Witch Weekly magazines, looking for articles on that accursed Potter family on the off chance that there might be some mention of a mysterious second-son of the family that Dumbledore was only about thirty-percent sure had even made it to the age of two.

At least it was not all bad; Dumbledore had gotten Minerva McGonagall going through a stack of The Quibbler paper. The head of Gryffindor house, who was sitting across, but a little to the right of Snape, looked like she might soon have an aneurism from reading too many of the papers nonsense articles in too short a space of time.

Filius Flitwick, sitting on a large stack of books at the other end of the table was looking through the library's collection of Witch Weekly magazines. The supposedly more mature version of the magazines Snape was going through usually contained a lot more garbage than its teenager-aimed counterpart. Flitwick, however, was different from his colleagues; instead of getting worked up about the things written in the magazines he was reading through, the vertically-challenged charms Professor merely rolled his eyes and chuckled, occasionally adding something along the lines of "Oh the things these kids today think of as being important. I don't know."

Snape and McGonagall had, several hours ago both decided to ignore the head of Ravenclaw house.

Occasionally Madam Pince, the school's librarian would shuffle by, glaring angrily as though silently daring them to damage her precious collection of magazines or make even the slightest of noise.

Whilst McGonagall and Flitwick ignored the fussy librarian, Snape made a point of glowering right back at her and turning the pages of the magical magazine in his hands far too roughly and far too noisily each time she went by.

It was after one of these pass-bys by the librarian that Snape looked down and found his eyes looking into the smiling emerald green ones of Lily Evens. Even now, after all these years, he still refused to acknowledge her as a Potter.

Finally after a few moments he managed to rip his eyes away from hers and actually look at what the article was about. And it was disgusting.

After the events of Halloween 1981, it had not taken the Potters long to essentially become what the Muggles referred to as tabloid celebrities wherein they achieved one good thing and then coasted along on that for the rest of their lives; giving interviews at the drop of a button, allowing photographers into their home to take pictures of them looking like a family, turning up at a newly opened restaurant purely to generate a little interest in the place, or even endorsing the shoddiest of products, anything so long as the money was good and it got their faces in the paper.

The only other people in Wizarding society to do such things were the wives and girlfriends of famous Quidditch players and, later when they had been retired a couple of years, the actual Quidditch players themselves. In both of those cases such things were to be expected; the types of women Quidditch players usually married were blond, big breasted had had fluff instead of brains, and Quidditch has-beens were usually broke, addicted to fire whiskey and pain-relief potions, and had left most of their brains on the Quidditch pitch after being smacked by a bludger too many times.

But Lily Potter was different. She had brains. Or at least she did. Magazines like Teen Witch Weekly regularly promoted her as the type of person that all young girls should strive to be. Unfortunately Lily Potter was no longer the type of woman that a young girl should strive to be.

Young witches should strive to be healers, teachers, Aurors, world class potions mistresses; powerful figures who change the world for the better, not some brainless piece of eye-candy to be latched onto the arm of her equally brainless husband and then grin inanely for whatever camera happens to be on them at the time.

Lily Evans could have been any one of the former. Lily Potter was every bit of the latter.

Snape was drawn from his musings by the voice of Flitwick.

"Minerva, Severus, I think I've found something."

Both Snape and McGonagall set down the articles that they were reading and made their way to Flitwick's side.

"What is it?" asked McGonagall "What have you found?"

"Here," said Flitwick, shoving several magazines aside and setting down a copy of Witch Weekly dated for the last week of August, 1991 "This would have been last issue to come out before Arnold Potter started Hogwarts." he explained.

Snape and McGonagall leaned in closer to inspect the article.

The Boy-Who-Lived to Attend Hogwarts.

by Henrietta Hornsby

The article itself was the usual nonsensical hogwash that was regularly churned out whenever a piece on the Potters was published; who they were, why they were famous, a load of gushing over how smart James and Arnold Potter looked, and how pretty Lily, Charlotte and Isabella were in their dolled-up-especially-for-the-reporters state. And nowhere, anywhere was there a mention of a second Potter son.

"Filius, there is nothing in the article that helps us in any way whatsoever." said McGonagall, sounding just as exasperated as Snape felt.

"What? No," said Flitwick "Not the article, the picture."

Both Snape and McGonagall leaned in even closer to get a good look at the picture. It showed, quite clearly, James and Lily Potter, sitting in the front room of Potter manor, Arnold Potter sat between them, Charlotte and Isabella sat on their laps, surrounded by Sirius Black and his then-girlfriend-now-wife Emmeline Vance, and Remus Lupin, all looking like one big happy family.

And yet there was still no sign of the elusive second son.

"I'm still not seeing it, Filius." said McGonagall.

"You just missed it," said Flitwick "It'll come by again in a moment; watch by the door."

Snape and McGonagall stood stock still, staring intently at the spot of the picture that Flitwick had indicated.

Suddenly there it was; scarcely more than a shadow; blink and you'll miss it.

"That could be anything." said Snape, dismissively "A House Elf, a reporter snooping around whilst the picture was being taken..."

Flitwick snorted, half in derision, half in amusement.

"I keep forgetting that the pair of you don't have the Goblin eyesight that I inherited from my ancestors. Alright,"

With a wave of his wand he created a duplicate of the photograph. Another spell enlarged it, and another brightened the image quite substantially.

Again Snape and McGonagall watched intently and the people in the picture moved about, grinning inanely.

Then it happened again, a sudden movement over by the door, barely noticeable unless you were actually looking for it. But this time it was not just a shadow. With the picture brightened it looked more like a face.

It happened again and this time Flitwick gave a flick of his wand and all movement in the image stopped, frozen. And there, a little blurred but still fairly clear, was a face, in the shadow of an open door in the background.

Snape reached into his pocket and pulled out his glasses, a sign of his age, and shoved them on to get a better look at this almost seemingly random face.

Actually it was only half a face; the right side of the face, peering out of the darkness, taking a quick peek at what the other people in the photograph were up to.

"I'll go and find Albus." said McGonagall, turning to hurry off to find the Headmaster of Hogwarts.

Flitwick and Snape remained behind, staring at the picture, or rather the previously hidden face within it.

It was difficult to tell, but the boy seemed to have James Potter's face. He certainly had the unruly mop of jet-black hair on top of his head that had been the trademark of all male Potters for at least the last five generations.

"Well this does prove he survived You-Know-Who's attack." said Flitwick "But why in Merlin's name can we not remember him?"

"Damned if I know." replied Snape "He looks exactly like his brother. Two lots of the same person walking around, surely someone must have noticed. I mean, one of them was going around wearing

Ravenclaw-style robes. Surely that was enough to distinguish that there were two of them?"

Flitwick chuckled "Never stopped everyone getting those Patil twins mixed up. Those two may not have been pranksters on the scale of the Weasley twins, but they certainly enjoyed confusing everyone by switching the colours of their robes and pretending to be the other."

Snape rolled his eyes at the memory. By their seventh year, the Patil twins could have nearly every boy in their year running around doing things for them without any of them realising just which twin they were doing it for.

"I highly doubt that this is a similar case." said Snape "The two brothers are clearly anything but close, and you and I both know that Arnold Potter would never have traded places with anyone."

Flitwick nodded sadly. It was his opinion that all the fame and splendour that had been bestowed upon Arnold Potter throughout his life was what ultimately lead to his death. The young man certainly did seem to think that he was untouchable; almost like he thought that Lord Voldemort would not dare to touch such a loved public figure.

How wrong he was, and with a baby just a few months away as well.

Finally McGonagall returned to the library, with Albus Dumbledore hurrying along next to her.

"What have you found?" asked Dumbledore.

Flitwick gestured to the article in Witch Weekly.

Dumbledore's eyes fell onto the family picture, and then onto the enlarged, brightened and frozen picture above it.

His tired old blue eyes fell onto the pale, half hidden face hiding in the shadows by the door.

Dumbledore felt a surge of hope and excitement build up in him.

"There you are." he muttered, in a voice barely above a whisper.

Here was proof that there was a second son of the Potter family. There was a brother to Arnold Potter. There was someone that the Prophecy could be passed to, someone who could take up the title of the Chosen One.

The face of Harry James Potter appearing in this photograph represented one thing: hope.

There was hope now, hope that all was not lost.

Albus could not wait to lift the spirits of the public by announcing that they had found a successor to Arnold Potter. Albus could see it as a day where people cheered and cried tears of joy in the streets. But there was still one problem.

They would have to find him first.

And neither Dumbledore nor any of the three Professors with him had the faintest clue as to where he might be.

Given the current political climate, asking the Potters would be a very risky move. And the question that Albus Dumbledore now had to ask himself was; was he willing to take that risk?

A/N: and I think I will leave it there. Don't worry; I will introduce both Harry and Hermione soon, though I am a little uncertain as to the order I will introduce them, but Hermione first seems to fit better. A little heads up though; they are not going to be introduced in the same chapter, at the same time or the same place. You'll get one or the other.

Oh, and I'm not sure if the readers in the US or elsewhere are familiar with the term tabloid celebrity, so I'll try and explain it, though I think I got most of my point across in the chapter. A tabloid celebrity is celebrity, and I use that term very loosely, who has done very little, and yet certain tabloid newspapers and magazines, even certain television shows will insist on following them around for no other reason that doing so seems to sell. I hate to say it, but these people are usually female, and the magazines and television shows are far more often than not aimed at a preteen/teen/early twenties/female audience. This person may once have been a part of a band that flopped a while ago, or a singer who was pretty much a one-hit wonder, someone who entered a reality-TV show/talent

show or is simply the current partner of a footballer (soccer player), or a singer who can actually sing or an actor who can actually act, and they use this to make money, usually doing so by showing a lot of cleavage (of their usually fake breasts), wearing lots of fake tan, and generally behaving like one of those bratty kids you see on that show... I'll not name it, but chances are if you have access to MTV you may have seen it (it has also been parodied very well by South Park).

Don't get me wrong, I have no problem with the partners of famous people making a name for themselves, just not in that horribly demeaning way.

Sorry for ranting, that was really just to give you an even better idea of the kind of person Lily has become, though she's living off her son's fame rather than her husband's. Also I don't intend for her to have a fake tan/silicone injections in her lips/fake boobs. James is pretty much the same way, with Sirius and Remus not quite so bad, but still there.

And also if you happen to like those kinds of people and the publications that showcase them... well don't take it personally, it's just that I cannot stand them.

Anyway until next time...

Chapter 3: The Meeting.

Albus Dumbledore wore a sombre expression on his face as he looked at those gathered around the table.

With the loss of Arnold Potter, the Order of the Phoenix had become split, some staying with Dumbledore, and others siding with Moody.

A mere six important members remained on Dumbledore's side; Minerva McGonagall, Severus Snape, Molly Weasley and her son Ronald, Elphias Doge and Dedalus Diggle. There were a few lower-ranking Order members still on Dumbledore's side, but they were not of the group that Dumbledore considered his answer to Lord Voldemort's 'Inner Circle'.

With the Potters, those with jobs in the Ministry and the spy within the werewolf ranks all siding with Alastor Moody, Dumbledore could not help but think that he had, somehow, wound up with the raw end of the split. The only ones in this room that were actually of any use were Minerva and Severus.

Yup, definitely a bad hand, but it was all he had.

At least these numbers were somewhat bolstered, although unofficially, by Filius Flitwick. The diminutive charms professor had always refused to join up to the ranks of the Order, but that did not stop him from helping them out from time to time; like today.

Albus stood.

"Good evening." he said in a grandfatherly tone "It was nice of you all to come on such short notice. I know that it has been a trying few months for all of you, and I thank you for remaining strong to our cause. I hope, this evening, to present to you what to me seems to be the best news we have received in a long while.

"Although we all still feel the pain caused by the dreadful loss of Arnold Potter, it is my personal belief that we must strive to carry on. In Arnold's memory we must continue on as we have done, holding back the tide of darkness and keeping the Wizarding world safe.

"We must push ourselves to end this war. We must push ourselves to unite our fellow wizards and witches against Tom Riddle and his

forces, and to do that we must have a symbol of hope; a person for the people to place their belief in. We must find someone to take Arnold Potter's place."

"And where do you propose we find someone like that?" asked Diggle "Arnold had years of experience facing off against You-Know-Who, and "years" is not something that we have."

Dumbledore smiled genially and said "Ah, but you are forgetting the prophecy, which clearly stated that the one with the power to vanquish Voldemort would be born at the end of the seventh month. This could be transferred to another who meets the criteria."

"And that whole part about being born to those who have defied him three times?" asked Elphias "There are not many instances of people escaping You-Know-Who once, let alone three times."

"And to that end," said Dumbledore, using his wand to place on the wall the photograph that Flitwick had found "I present to you, Harry James Potter, brother of Arnold Samuel Potter, son of James Charlus Potter and Lily Iris Potter, who, at the time of his birth, had defied Tom Riddle three times."

All of the Order members got up out of their seats and made their way closer to the photograph.

"He looks a bit young." observed Molly.

"The picture is an old one." said Minerva "Taken just before he came to Hogwarts. Unfortunately it is the only one that we have."

"Any evidence that he is actually still alive?" asked Doge.

"None." replied Snape "We have written articles that say he attended Hogwarts up until the end of his fourth year, but after that the trail goes cold."

"And none of us can recall him ever attending Hogwarts." added Flitwick "It's like he disappeared; taking any memory we had of him with him."

"If he really existed at all." said Dedalus "I for one do not recall ever hearing of a second Potter son."

"We found an announcement in the Daily Prophet that announced the birth of twin boys to the Potters." said Snape "This photograph is the only reference we can find of him until he started Hogwarts."

"Is it possible that he could have been killed by You-Know-Who already?" asked Molly "You said that he seemed to vanish at the end of his fourth year; if my memory serves, that is also around the same time that You-Know-Who returned to physical form. Is it not possible that You-Know-Who tried to find Arnold, but got this boy instead?"

Dumbledore shook his head "If that had been the case, Tom surely would have used the body to incite panic; the brothers look so much alike everyone could have been made to think that Harry was Arnold. And it is also for that very reason that I do not believe that Harry joined Tom; again, the chance to incite panic would have been too great for Tom to pass up for this long.

"Ronald," he continued "you were in the same year as them. Can you recall anything of Harry?"

"No." replied Ron "I can't even recall Arnold mentioning a brother. But if no one can remember him, then perhaps he was a quiet person who wanted to keep out of the way. You ought to ask Granger. She liked to befriend all the weird kids; perhaps he was one of them."

That certainly got Dumbledore thinking. He could remember the school days of Hermione Granger well. When a Troll had infiltrated the school, Arnold, Ron and a few of their friends had gone to find it, hoping to get a lot of glory for defeating it. When they found it in the girls bathroom, the Troll was about to kill Granger. Fortunately for her, the appearance of the boys distracted the Troll long enough for her to get away.

After that encounter, Hermione Granger had tried to befriend Arnold, but that lasted little more than a month before his attitude put her off. Instead, she sought out other friendless students and pulled them all together into a group. The majority of this group were Muggle-born students who struggled to fit in, but one or two were half or pure blood; such as one Luna Lovegood.

Two years after finishing Hogwarts, Miss Granger had returned to the school to teach Muggle Studies; a controversial appointment, as many pure-bloods hated the idea of a Muggle-born teaching their students anything.

The Muggle-born students, however, loved her, given how she was the only member of staff to actually listen and care about their concerns.

If Harry Potter had made any friends whilst at Hogwarts, it would have been her.

"Minerva," said Albus, addressing his deputy headmistress "Could you please go and locate Madam Granger? Young Ronald may be right; there is a possibility that she knew Harry during school."

"At once, Albus." answered McGonagall before getting up from her seat and heading out the door.

"Right," said Dumbledore after she had left "whilst we are waiting, is there any more business?"

No one said anything.

With a heavy sigh, Albus sat down. It was going to be a few very long minutes of awkward silence before Minerva returned.

A/N: Right, I'm going to leave it there. This chapter came in short, was horrible to write, but I guess it does what it needs. I could have introduced Hermione in this chapter, but I feel that, as the main female protagonist in this story, and in the canon, she deserves a chapter dedicated to her story. That chapter is coming soon, so watch out for it.

Chapter 4: Hermione

Hermione Granger was quite proud of what she had become within the Wizarding World. Before coming to Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to receive an education about the world of magic, she was quite a lonely child. At primary school, she was made fun of and bullied by the other children, who poked fun at her looks. No one wanted to be her friend, especially seeing as they all knew her parents were the dentists who treated their teeth. Hoping to gain some kind of acceptance Hermione had thrown herself into her studies, determined to be smart if she could not be popular.

Unfortunately that just made the bullying worse. It turned out that people did not like people smarter than themselves, and poked fun at them in order to feel better about their own inadequate academic performances.

The teachers did not go much on Hermione either; it seemed that no teacher really appreciated being proved wrong or ignorant of a subject by a nine-year old pupil.

The only people she ever really had to turn to were her parents, but they were always so busy with work, and sometimes both of them had to go away for a weekend or maybe even a whole week to attend some kind of conference, leaving Hermione in the care of an aunt or uncle who did not like her because she was smarter than their own kids.

She had been terribly alone for the first decade of her life, and she had hoped that all of that would change when she went to Hogwarts. It did not, at least not at first.

She quickly found out about the pure-blood society, one that would discriminate against her just because of who her parents were. She had striven to prove herself in class by presenting answers that no Muggle-born should know. It was a vain attempt to prove that she belonged in their world, and she quickly learnt that none of the magic-raised pupils appreciated it; with some like Malfoy, Nott and Smith thinking of her as nothing but a jumped up mudblood who did not yet know her place in their world.

She tried her best to fit in, but no one cared for her. Her birthday came around, but no one cared; no one even asked about the card and present that she received from her parents.

She gave it two months, but by the end of October she was so miserable that she was actually seriously considering dropping out of Hogwarts altogether; it would not have been too late to return to a Muggle school, and her two months delayed start could easily have been explained away as an illness.

But then Halloween had happened. She had only wanted to help that big-nosed red headed boy; there was never any reason to go off at her like that. But he had. His words stung deeply, and the fact that all the boys in her class laughed at it was pretty much the final nail in the coffin of her dream of the Wizarding world being a place where she could fit in.

In the girls' bathroom she had spent all afternoon crying. No one came to look for her, and no one who entered the bathroom offered any comfort. In fact Pansy Parkinson made things worse when she said "Worse blubbing in there? Oh it's only the know-it-all mudblood. No one important." She and her friend Millicent Bulstrode then left the bathroom laughing whilst Hermione sunk even further into her despair.

And finally, just as she had gotten her tears under control and convinced herself to return to her dormitory in Gryffindor tower to write a letter to her parents requesting that they withdraw her from Hogwarts, a Troll had come lumbering into the bathroom. A full grown, twelve-foot tall, very smelly, club wielding Mountain Troll. Just as she was thinking that she was going to die, the door to the bathroom had burst open and all five boys in her house year burst in. The appearance of Arnold Potter, Ron Weasley, Neville Longbottom, Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnegan distracted the Troll long enough for Hermione to be able to escape from the corner she had been huddled up in and get to the a safer spot by the door.

Evidently Arnold Potter's father had taught him some spells not learnt in Hogwarts until fourth year because Arnold Potter had thrown a bludgeoning hex at the Troll. Apparently he had shown his friends how to do this for all of them began firing the same spell continuously until the Troll dropped to the ground. It was at that point that Professors McGonagall, Snape and Quirrel had arrived and

demanded an explanation. And for the first time in her life, Hermione found herself telling a lie. These boys had just saved her life, the least she could do was save them from a detention. She invented some cock-and-bull story about wanting to prove herself by bringing down the Troll on her own, but fortunately the boys had followed her and saved her.

Somewhat unbelievably McGonagall had bought the story, stuck Hermione in a week's detention and awarded twenty points to each of the boys.

Hermione had severed those detentions in the hope that she now had some friends. Meanwhile the boys had been living it up as the heroes of Gryffindor.

When they had heard from McGonagall about the Troll incident, both of Hermione's parents wanted to pull her out of school. Hermione had dissuaded them from this course of action, however, by telling them something a little closer to the truth, that she hadn't gone looking for the Troll, but was just in the wrong place and the wrong time, and she was fortunate that the boys had turned up. The way she worded it made it sound like the boys were her friends already and had come looking for her. That letter, along with the assurances of Professor McGonagall that such a thing would not happen again persuaded her parents to allow her to remain at Hogwarts.

For the next month Hermione managed to somewhat worm her way into the lives of the boys; Dean and Seamus were pretty much indifferent to her, Ron seemed to think that he had struck gold when Hermione has offered to help him with his homework and Neville genuinely did appreciate all the help she gave him, and Hermione really thought she was going to be accepted, even if it was just for what her intelligence could offer.

Unfortunately there was a small problem; Arnold. He saw himself as the intelligent one of the group (there was not a lot to prove that notion wrong) and rather liked it that way. That Hermione was far smarter than he was seemed to be a great insult to him and by the end of November Hermione found herself shunned again. Dean and Seamus were still indifferent to her, Neville seemed to have some sort of sense of obligation to agree with Arnold, and Ron clearly saw Arnold as his ticket to fame and fortune and so readily sided with him, no matter the cost to his grades.

What Arnold Potter wanted, Arnold Potter got, and at that time he wanted Hermione Granger out of the group.

The evening of the 25th November 1991 found Hermione Granger curled up in a ball on top of the Astronomy tower crying her eyes out. She wanted to leave Hogwarts now, but how could she when she had so successfully convinced her parents to let her stay against their wishes? How could she leave when she had put so much effort into convincing them that she had finally made some friends?

She had been up there for a good hour and a half before someone sat down beside her and wrapped her into a hug. She had not bothered to look up to see just who this person was, she just turned into them and buried her face into their chest and cried until she felt better.

After that evening Hermione decided to change the way she behaved in this world. No longer would she be the little know it all desperate to prove that she belonged; instead she would take a different path; befriending those who had no friends; bringing together the unpopular and the bullied kids into a group of their own who could be there for each other. Most of this group were Muggle-born like herself, but others were those outcast for different reasons, like Luna Lovegood, universally deemed an oddball of the extreme variety, or Su Li and Padma Patil; Ravenclaw house might have been comprised of many intellectuals, but putting them all together forced them to compete with each other, and something like being of Chinese or Indian decent soon brought out the worst in your housemates.

By the time Hermione had finished Hogwarts, she had amassed a large group of friends who all looked out for each other and hung out together, regardless of house boundaries, year group, blood status, gender or race. It gave Hermione a huge sense of satisfaction to have been heavily involved in the creation of such a group, and that was part of the reason that she returned to Hogwarts to teach.

During her time at Hogwarts, Hermione had not found a teacher she really looked up to and respected. She had admired Professors like McGonagall, Sprout and Sinistra who were successful teachers able to show that they were as good as any wizard, but even they were prone to turning a blind eye to the suffering of some pupils. And

even Professor Flitwick, who himself suffered discrimination based on his Goblin heritage, ignored the suffering of many of his students; seeming to prefer to allow them all to fight it out amongst themselves.

The other thing that made Hermione return was the state of the Muggle Studies course. Hermione did not like to speak ill of the dead, but Professor Burbage was a very ill-equipped and unlearned teacher of her subject. The books in class were at least a hundred years out of date, despite being published recently, and to make matters worse Professor Burbage was a pure-blood witch who spent very little time in the non-magical world. Despite believing quite rightly that wizards and witches were not all that different from Muggles, Charity Burbage was clueless about the current world of the non-magical people.

Following the murder of Professor Burbage by Lord Voldemort himself during the summer before Hermione's seventh year at Hogwarts, she was replaced by a Professor Pyrites who, whilst having all the qualifications (and Hermione used that term very lightly) seemed to be even more ignorant of the Muggle world than Professor Burbage was, and liked to use the lessons to try and emphasise how many points of Muggle society and culture proved that wizards and witches were better than them. This just meant that there were record-low numbers of Muggle-borns and half-bloods attending Muggle Studies class and after three years' worth of complaints Dumbledore had to let the man go; which was a good thing because three weeks later he was arrested for torturing Muggles whilst in full Death Eater garb.

Hermione's appointment to Professor of Muggle Studies caused quite a bit of controversy, perhaps even more so than caused by employing former Death Eater Severus Snape and known Werewolf Remus Lupin combined. Pure bloods balked at the idea of a Muggle-born teaching their kids anything and the Ministry, ever eager to please them, lined up a grand total of fifteen candidates they believed to be 'better suited' to teach the course. Many of them did have the necessary qualifications to teach the course, but Hermione challenged them by asking five questions; what is an aeroplane, what was the name of the first female Prime Minister of Britain, who wrote the book 'the Lord of the Rings', explain the popular sport Rugby and what is the current ratio of Muggles to

witches and wizards in Britain. None of them could answer any of those questions.

Hermione had then asked if there was actually anyone better to teach children about the Muggle world than someone who spent nearly twelve years living in it, still had parents living in it, and every morning read two of its newspapers.

Finally the Ministry and all but the worst pure-bloods had relented, so long as Hermione was referred to a Madam Granger, rather than Professor. Hermione did not care about the title, but such a thing just further proved just how backwards this world was.

As a teacher, Hermione was everything she had wanted in a teacher growing up; a friend, someone to look up to, someone who would listen, and the students, particularly those of Muggle birth really appreciated that, and she was regularly informed she was the favourite teacher of every Muggle-born to pass through the school, even of those who did not take her class, something that really seemed to irk a few of the other Professors for some reason.

Today was the third day of the new school year, and for Hermione that meant she would have her first class of third years this year. That meant it was time to begin showing some new Muggle borns just how clueless many purebloods really were whilst making the purebloods realise just how brilliant their non-magical counterparts really were.

Hermione got up from her seat and opened the door, where she greeted her new students before beckoning them inside.

Once they were all seated, she addressed them.

"Good morning class. I'm your professor, Hermione Granger and we are here to learn about our non-magical counterparts. It is my hope that each time you leave this classroom, it is with a far better understanding of both their world and ours. I know some of you will have come here hoping for an easy subject, after all how hard can it be to learn about people that cannot do magic, it's not as if they've ever achieved anything, right?"

She saw a couple of purebloods nod.

"Wrong." said Hermione "I'm here to tell you, that despite what some of your mummies and daddies say, the Muggle world has made more advancements in the last one-hundred and fifty years than the Wizarding world has made in the last thousand."

That seemed to cause a stir; the Bletchley boy in particular looked downright indignant at the idea.

"One thing that you will learn in my class is that, whilst wizards and witches have magic, many things that they do can be done just as well, if not better, by Muggles who utilise such mediums as electrical power. Something that I will ask of you regularly, particularly those of you who carry on with this subject during your N.E.W.T level studies, is to come up with ideas for how certain aspects of Muggle culture can be used to better the Wizarding world. Some of you may think that such a notion is preposterous, but just this summer St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries carried out its first organ transplant; something that the Muggle world has been able to do for decades, if not longer. The healer who carried this out was a Muggle-born, who had just finished healer's training six weeks prior, and the idea for organ transplants was born in this very classroom during that woman's sixth year in this school. Loath as they are to admit it, even the most pure-of-blood healers are being forced to admit that such an action is the biggest advancement in healing practices in the Wizarding world since the invention of the Wolfbane Potion by Hector Damocles in 1979, that's thirty-three years ago."

Hermione could see the positive affect her words were having already.

Before she could continue, however, there was a knock at the classroom door and Professor McGonagall entered.

"Madam Granger, Professor Dumbledore would like to speak with you in his office."

Hermione nodded "Okay, tell him I'll be there as soon as this class is over."

"Professor Dumbledore was most insistent that he see you right away." said McGonagall "I can take over your class until you get back."

Hermione gave a sigh and stood "Alright. Do you know the introductory lesson plan?"

McGonagall stared at her rather blankly for a few moments before being forced to admit "No."

Giving another sigh, Hermione picked up a textbook from her desk and walked over to Professor McGonagall. She handed the book over and said "Just have them take turns reading the introduction and the first chapter aloud until I get back."

It was far from ideal, but it did not take Hermione long in this job to work out that what Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore wanted, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore got. As far as she was concerned the old coot could wait until the evening if he wanted to talk to her, or alternatively he could wait until the weekend if he wanted to talk to her about something not related to the school. Really though, it was not worth getting into an argument with another professor about it.

With a wave of her wand, Hermione summoned her cloak from the back of her chair, swung it over her shoulders and left the classroom.

Minerva McGonagall had a slight scowl on her face as she watched her former student-now colleague leave the room. Unlike most Professors in the castle, Madam Granger had very little time for Albus Dumbledore. She did not like him, she did not trust him and she certainly had no respect for him. That could probably be traced back to her school days when she was bullied. Dumbledore did nothing to stop it, and none of the teachers did anything either. McGonagall knew that Madam Granger was popular with the students, and that was something that worried Professor Dumbledore greatly; the one teacher on staff who did not like him was more popular than him, especially with the Muggle-born students. McGonagall knew that Dumbledore had considered getting rid of Hermione Granger more than once before, but the problem was that she was such a good influence on her students, particularly the Muggle-borns. No fewer than two dozen advancements in Wizarding society in the last twelve years could be traced back to

the discussions that Madam Granger encouraged the students in this class to have, and for that reason alone Madam Granger could easily be identified as the one teacher within Hogwarts to contribute the most to dragging the Wizarding world out of its relative stagnation of the past two hundred years.

McGonagall herself was in two minds about the young teacher; she was definitely a positive influence that pushed the younger generation to strive to better the world in which they lived, but something about a teacher who trusted the school's headmaster so little unsettled the Transfiguration Professor.

Turning her attention away from the now closed classroom door and back to the students, she found the entire class staring at her expectantly.

"Very well, Mr Bennett, if you would begin reading please..."

Hermione arrived at the stone gargoyle that guarded the entrance to the Headmaster's office. With a roll of her eyes she gave the password "Sugar Owls" and waited for the gargoyle to move aside before climbing the stairs.

She did not bother to knock, the old man always knew who was there anyway, and to do so would give a false image of respect.

Marching into the office, and completely ignoring the rest of the Order sitting there she addressed the Headmaster.

"Professor Dumbledore, what is so important that it cannot wait until after class?"

Several of the Order members, Molly Weasley in particular, bristled at her attitude, but Hermione paid them no mind. In her opinion the Order of the Phoenix was nothing more than a vigilante group and an ineffective one at best.

Severus Snape and Filius Flitwick actually smiled, or rather smirked in Snape's case. Both enjoyed watching Dumbledore deal with someone who did not think the sun shone out of his arse.

Dumbledore did his best to seem unconcerned by Madam Granger's attitude towards him, but it drove him nuts to have a teacher on staff

that disliked him so, and he hated dealing with her, especially when he had already annoyed her. He mentally cursed himself; he should have known that she had a lesson now. To interrupt such a thing would guarantee that she would be far less co-operative than normal.

Still she was here and he might as well get on with it now, regardless of how irritated she was.

"I am sorry for disturbing your lesson, Madam Granger," he said trying to appear genial to placate her somewhat "but an important matter has come up that we desperately need your help on."

Hermione huffed in irritation "Fine. Get on with it." Clearly his genial tone was failing, as it normally did with her.

Molly snapped at her "Don't talk to Professor Dumbledore like that."

Hermione glared at the older witch "I'm here to teach students, you old Harpy. I'm not here to assist the Order of the Flaming Pigeon. Get on with it so I can get back to doing my job."

Hoping to prevent more arguments, Dumbledore spoke up.

"Actually Madam Granger, we were hoping for your assistance in identifying a student from your days as a student." He placed the enlarged and brightened photograph into the table "This, we believe, is the twin brother of Arnold Potter, and we were hoping that you could tell us more about him."

Hermione picked up the photograph and examined it with an entirely bored expression on her face "I was unaware that Arnold Potter had a brother, far less a twin."

"Yes, quite a few of us were surprised when we realised it." said Flitwick, coming forwards and placing the school documents relating to Harry Potter onto the table "We do have proof that he attended Hogwarts until the end of his fourth year at least, but after that the trail sort of goes blank."

"And what makes you think I'd know anything about him?" asked Hermione "Weasley over there was Arnold's best friend. Surely if anyone knows it'll be him."

Ron shook his head "Arnold never mentioned a brother, and I certainly cannot remember one."

"And what about the parents?" asked Hermione, leafing through Harry Potter's school file "Aren't they a part of this little vigilante group? Surely they know about their other son. And the sisters must surely have realised they have two brothers."

Dumbledore did not like his Order being referred to as a vigilante group, but answered anyway.

"We are currently on the outs with the Potter family. It seems that they are not happy with the way things have gone..."

"I can't imagine why." said Hermione "It's not as if you filled their son's head with notions of grandeur for thirty-two years and then let him be kidnapped from right under your nose only for his severed body parts turn up all over the country a fortnight, is it?"

Dumbledore had nothing to say to that, and so just cleared his throat whilst shifting uncomfortably in his seat.

Hermione continued reading through the school documents for a few minutes before speaking again.

"Well, from the photograph and the fact that Arnold had twin is not well known, I can deduce that this Harry's home life was not pleasant. Looking at the way the Potter family has lived these past thirty years, I'd say they got so caught up in the hype of their son being the so-called Boy-Who-Lived that they completely forgot that they ever had a second son. Perhaps he was late in displaying his magic and they were ashamed of him. I happen to know of several accounts of purebloods either dumping squib children in Muggle orphanages or simply giving them to the House Elves to raise. The fact that the boy in the photograph is sticking to the shadows where he cannot be easily noticed supports the latter. From the from sheet of his school work, I can see that he was an unexpected arrival, possibly due to his parents not responding to his admission letter, or perhaps one was never sent and he just turned up anyway. He obviously was unsure of his heritage, and clearly no one bothered to ever find out.

"It seems that sticking to the shadows continued to be his modus operandi when he arrived at Hogwarts if the reports by the teachers are anything to go by. However, all the reports from his teachers are very similar; in fact looking at his reports during his second year, there are at least three teachers who simply created a duplicate of the end of first year reports for all three terms. It seems that they, at least, had no clue who he was, despite his being very bright, as his end-of-year exam results indicate.

"It is entirely possible that he sought to hide his intelligence in class given that he was a Ravenclaw. In my experience, that house is actually far worse for bullying than either Slytherin or Gryffindor, as they all turn on others in order to try and prove themselves to be the best; Luna Lovegood, Su Li and Padma Patil are the best examples that I can think of. Perhaps Harry saw how they were treated and decided to stay hidden so as to not attract the attentions of the bullies himself.

"The fact that during his third year he tried out for the Quidditch team seems to indicate that he wanted to gain some kind of acceptance. Perhaps he was tired of being alone and wanted to feel like he might actually belong at Hogwarts. Or perhaps he wanted to say 'hey there is another Potter son, and I'm just as good as my brother'. Clearly he was unsuccessful, although the note does point out that he caught the golden snitch fairly quickly, so perhaps no one cared. I can recall Cho Chang actually becoming Ravenclaw's seeker that year. She was rather popular, but did not have the best track-record on the pitch if I remember, so it's entirely possible that the Ravenclaw captain decided to go for someone popular rather than someone good.

"As to the massive fall in his grades between the end of third year and the end of fourth year, I'd have to say that he must have given up trying. Given how his brother was entered into the Tri-Wizard Tournament that year, Harry probably came to the conclusion that nothing he could do would ever move him out of his brother's shadow, especially if his parents ignored his end-of-year results at the end of his third year. The fact that he did not return for his fifth year supports this."

"And you have never heard of him?" asked Snape "He wasn't a part of your little group or anything?"

Hermione shook her head "Nope. It would seem that I missed one. And it seems like I am not the only person who did. It looks like everyone overlooked him over the years."

"Is there any possibility that anyone in your group will know of him?" asked Dumbledore.

"I can ask." said Hermione "A couple of the Ravenclaws that are my age might recognise him. Can I have a duplicate of the photograph?"

With a wave of his wand, Flitwick created a copy of the photograph and handed it to Hermione, who rolled it up and tucked it into an inside pocket of her robes.

"If you don't mind me asking, what do you want him for, anyway? Not thinking of making him his brother's replacement are you?"

No one said anything, but the looks on their faces were enough to answer her question.

With a roll of her eyes, Hermione turned and left the room, muttering something along the lines of convincing some of her friends to move abroad, out of Voldemort's way.

"Is it just me or does she seem like someone who could do with getting laid?" Ron asked the room as a whole once the door had closed.

"She does have a male companion that she sees on a regular basis." replied Dumbledore "She always seems so much happier after going to see him. No doubt she'll be heading out to see him tonight; she usually does after we have a talk. For some reason my mere presence is enough to drive her up the wall."

"Can't imagine why." observed Snape sarcastically.

Three corridors and several floors away from the headmaster's office, Madam Hermione Granger slipped into an empty classroom and secured the door with several locking and sealing charms.

She then rolled up the sleeve on her left arm. A few waved of her wand removed several glamour charms and revealed a black tattoo

on her forearm. She pressed her wand against it and it rippled and glowed with an eerie green light. The tattoo stung for a few seconds and then the pain faded.

Message sent, she reapplied the glamour charms, rolled down her sleeve, undid the door and headed back to her class. If she hurried she could get a good quarter of an hour's work done.

A/N: And that'll do for this chapter; the longest chapter of this story and my biggest update ever. This is why I decided to give Hermione her own chapter. Did you like it?

Chapter 5: Reporting to her Master.

The sun had just disappeared beyond the horizon when she apparated onto the middle of an old dirt road. So far September had been rather warm, but this evening there was a little bit of a chill in the air, causing her to pull her black cloak a little tighter around herself as she made her way along the path. The further along the path she went, the more dense the surrounding forest became, with tall, old trees casting dark shadows.

Finally the path narrowed and eventually ended, but she kept walking through the darkness between the trees. A hundred yards or so later she came to a ward line. She could feel the ward that compelled unwanted visitors to turn back, but the tattoo on her arm allowed her to cross the barrier. Now ahead of her, instead of a dense, dark forest, there was a hedgerow, comprised of beech, twelve feet in height. The hedgerow was broken in the middle by large, ornately decorated steel gates, painted black with gold markings. A simple flick of her wand caused the gates to swing open soundlessly and she continued her walk forward.

A narrow pathway of paving slabs wound its way up to a manor house in the distance, light glowing through the windows. Paying no attention to the land surrounding her, she made her way to the huge oak doors of the manor where two men, dressed similarly to her, stood guard. She pulled back her sleeve to present the tattoo on her arm to them. Both nodded to her and pulled open the doors.

Inside she made her way along several darkening corridors lit up by flaming torches. Ignoring the many portraits and other items of interest that adorned the walls she quickly came to a marble staircase which she ascended with ease. At the end of another corridor she came to a large door, guarded by a woman. A quick brandishing of her tattoo later found the door being opened. She took several steps into the room before pausing as the door was closed almost silently behind her.

The room was large and dimly lit; the only light coming from the fireplace located on the opposite side of the room, and no more than four flaming torches mounted on the walls.

The majority of the room was taken up by a long, narrow mahogany table, surrounded by twenty high-backed chairs. All of these chairs seemed to be occupied. She recognised every face there.

From the head of the table, located closest to the fireplace, the voice came.

"Hermione. We were beginning to think that you had lost your way. Come, we've saved you a seat."

With a small nod of acknowledgement Hermione Granger made her way to the empty seat located at her master's side.

Once she was seated he said "You bring news, I trust?"

Meeting his eyes she replied "My Lord, my news comes from the group of the Order of the Phoenix that still stands with Dumbledore."

Those at the table quickly broke out into excited murmurings which were quelled when their master raised his hand for silence. Once they had quietened, he motioned for her to continue.

"My Lord, Albus Dumbledore has become aware of a second Potter son; a twin to Arnold Potter."

Once again the table broke out in murmurings, and once again they were quelled by the raised hand of their master.

Hermione carefully watched her master's face as he processed this new information. She knew that bad news could change his mood for the worse, and this had a very high likelihood of being seen as bad news.

Thankfully though, his face broke out into a small smile.

"Has he now?" he asked "The old fool has finally acknowledged the existence of Harry Potter? It has certainly taken him long enough."

Several of those around the table laughed, though some more boldly than others.

"And does Dumbledore believe that he has a way to gain control of this man?" he asked.

"No my lord," Hermione answered "Dumbledore has no clue as to where he is located, and seeing as he is currently on the outs with Potter's parents, that line is unavailable to him. All that he has to go on is a newspaper cutting from the family announcements section confirming that Harry is Arnold's twin, an old photograph that somehow managed to capture Harry as the age of eleven, and a few school-related documents that only go up to fourth year. After that the trail goes blank."

"So Dumbledore has no proof as to whether or not Harry Potter is still alive?" he asked.

"No my Lord."

He remained still for a few moments, his eyes staring into hers, before he spoke again.

"Very well. Let us hope that it stays that way. You have done very well to bring me this news. You will, of course, be rewarded for it later. For now let us move onto other things."

He turned his gaze away from her and looked at another black-robed figure seated halfway along the table.

"Malfoy, how goes the new marriage?"

The blond sat up a little straighter upon being addressed "Things are going well my Lord though I still fear that it may bring some unpleasant ramifications later."

"Nonetheless, it is an upstanding pure-blood marriage." he turned his head to a woman a few seats to Malfoy's right "I trust that the head of Clan Greengrass no longer has any objections?"

Daphne Greengrass, who had taken over headship of the Clan Greengrass when both her parents were killed by Aurors during a Death Eater attack on a Muggle shopping centre, turned met her master's gaze with a cool, indifferent expression "None, my Lord."

He smiled at her and gave a slight nod of his head before turning his attention back to Malfoy.

"Are there any children on the way?"

"None as of yet, my Lord." Malfoy replied.

"You must look to the security of your family's future, Malfoy." he said "With Lucius gone, the Malfoy fortune hangs on the head of his son. If the Malfoy line is ended, so too goes its money and its influence. Losing that will damage our world greatly."

He said no more on the matter, but to Malfoy the message was clear.

Out of the corner of her eye, Hermione saw movement. She turned her head and saw a monstrous serpent slither out of the darkening corner as her master asked if there was any more business to report.

Receiving no answer he stood to address them.

"My friends, tonight we have a special guest joining us." a flick of his wand caused an unlit torch in the corner of the room opposite the snake to light up. There, floating in the air, upside-down and slowly turning, was a body. Slowly the body drifted out of the corner and moved over the table, where it remained floating in the middle, still turning slowly.

The eyes of Greengrass and Malfoy lit up in recognition as their master gave another flick of his wand to awaken the captive.

"Some of you," he spoke "will recognise this man as Blaise Zabini, a Ministry employee who has, in the past few years, gladly given up names and addresses aplenty to our enemies, leading to the losses of many. This afternoon he was apprehended by Davis and Moon and brought to me, begging to forgiveness."

The eyes of Blaise Zabini were wide with fear as he rotated in the air. He had a feeling that he was going to die soon. Slowly he turned and his eyes caught two familiar faces.

"Greengrass," he begged "Greengrass help me, please."

She turned her nose up at him.

He looked to Malfoy.

"Please." he begged.

Malfoy scowled at him "I have no time for the likes of you."

Zabini continued to rotate, sending pleading looks to all those gathered. All he got in return were scowls. None of them were sympathetic. Finally his eyes landed on Hermione.

"Granger, do something... please?"

"Never." she relied.

Zabini's eyes came to the head of the table, where he saw his captor holding a wand and aiming it at him.

"Avada Kedavra."

A pulse of green-coloured magic left the wand and slammed into Zabini, ending his life. No one flinched as the curse hit him, and no one flinched when his lifeless body dropped with a thud to the table.

The head of the great snake rose above the table, its forked tongue flickering to taste the air before turning to look up at its master.

He gave her a fond look and scratched her head before speaking in parsel tongue;

"Dinner, my friend."

With ease the snake pulled herself up into the table and wound her way down to the body. Opening her huge mouth wide, she bit into it.

Those sat around the table were so morbidly fascinated with the sight that they barely registered their master raising himself up out of his chair.

"Meeting dismissed." he said.

A/N: And that's it for this chapter. I know its short, but it does what it needs. Stay tuned for more, coming soon.

Chapter 6: Locating Harry.

The Goblin seated behind the ornate desk in the cramped office in Gringotts Wizarding Bank raised an incredulous eyebrow at the two wizards seated opposite him. In all his years working for the bank, including the past five spend as deputy manager, Billhook had never heard of a request like it.

"What you are asking of me is to betray a valued Gringotts customer. Do you have any idea what kind of ramifications that could bring upon us? Especially when you consider that he is of an Ancient and Noble House?"

"He has nothing to do with his family." said Snape "He has as good as been disinherited."

"But he hasn't." replied Billhook "They could have not spoken to him for a century and it won't matter; if Gringotts does this to one of their own, then family strife won't matter, the Potters will still come down hard on us; all the old families work like that; you know this as well as I, Dumbledore."

Albus Dumbledore leaned back in his seat, surveying the Goblin before him. In the past hour he had managed to gather from the Goblin that Harry James Potter was indeed still alive, and was active in the Wizarding world in so far as he had an account with Gringotts. It was obvious that the Goblins knew where Harry was located, but they did not want to give that information up for obvious reasons. For the greater good or not, to give this information up to Dumbledore would be a serious breach of trust, and many old families were likely to come down hard on them for such an action.

But that did not change the fact that Dumbledore needed that information. Harry had to be made to take his brother's place, there was no one else. After a few moments of pondering, Dumbledore sent a look to Snape and nodded. Snape leaned over and picked up off the floor the bag that he and Dumbledore had brought to this meeting and removed from it a smaller cloth bag filled with gold.

"We are, of course, willing to make this worth your while." said Snape, depositing the bag of gold onto the desk.

Billhook's eyes widened at the sight of the bag, and then he promptly excused himself from the room.

"Do you really think that he will give up the information?" asked Snape.

Dumbledore nodded "They will, but most likely not until we offer them everything that we can. When you have lived as long as I have, Severus, you learn that everyone has a price that they are willing to accept, even the Goblins."

Billhook returned with two other Goblins. Once all three were seated, Billhook introduced them.

"Professor Dumbledore, Professor Snape, this is my esteemed colleague Griphook. He is the Goblin in charge of the Potter family vaults, including the one belonging to one Harry Potter. And this is the Great Ragnok, the mighty leader of the Goblin Nation."

Dumbledore bowed his head respectfully to Ragnok, and Snape quickly mirrored his actions.

Griphook was the first to speak "It is my understanding, gentlemen that you wish us to breach the trust of one of our most valued customers. To what purpose?"

Resigning himself to having to explain everything again, Dumbledore said "We need to locate Harry Potter so that he can be made to take his brother's place as the Chosen One."

"And since we knew where he is, you have come asking." finished Ragnok "Dumbledore, do you any idea of what the ramifications of such an action would be? You are asking us to violate the trust of a very prominent Noble and Ancient House. You are asking us to break no fewer than thirteen treaties that we have made with the Ministry of Magic. All of the gold in Britain would not be worth that."

As he said that, he pushed the bag of gold away from him.

"I apologise, Lord Ragnok" said Dumbledore "I am afraid that I was not entirely clear. In addition to the gold, I can also offer you this."

At his words Snape withdrew from the bag a large scroll tied with a ribbon around the middle.

Ragnok took it from Snape, unfurled it and examined the text.

"A full pardon?" he asked, looking up at Dumbledore.

The aged Headmaster gave a nod "In my capacity as Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot, I can completely absolve you of any wrongdoing. I have already signed it and once you tell us where Harry Potter is located, no one can touch you."

Dumbledore really had hoped that the sack of gold would be enough to sway the Goblins; using his position as Chief Warlock in such a way could cause problems for him down the road, but needs must, and right now he needed to find Harry Potter. And at least it looked like he was going to get what he wanted before he had to throw in his last bargaining chip: the Sword of Gryffindor.

Ragnok, Billhook and Griphook all exchanged looked before nodding.

"Very well." said Ragnok, but we will hold you to your word Dumbledore. Turn on us once you have the information, and the Dumbledore family vaults will suffer, understood?"

Dumbledore merely nodded in reply.

Ragnok gave a nod to Billhook and got up to leave. Griphook followed, snatching up the bag of gold as he went.

When the door closed, Billhook addressed the two wizards.

"Harry Potter currently resides at in an un-numbered house on the northern outskirts of the village of Littleton in in Somerset. Good day gentlemen."

Dismissed, Dumbledore and Snape left the office. Neither said a word until they were back at Hogwarts.

"Do you wish to confront him head on?" asked Snape.

"No." replied Dumbledore "It's best if we observe him for a bit. You go, and take a couple of the younger members with you. Do not let him know that you are there, just observe him for a few hours and then come back to report in."

Snape nodded and headed out through the floo.

Neither Dumbledore nor Snape had noticed the House Elf listening intently nearby.

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Ten minutes later Snape arrived on the outskirts of Littleton. With him were Terry Boot, a former Ravenclaw who was in the same school year as the two Potter boys, and Ryan Spinks, a former Slytherin who was also from the same school year.

Neither knew of who they were going to see, only that they were to observe the person for an hour or two.

The trio cast disillusionment spells upon themselves and made their way along to a large cottage, the only building on the outskirts of the village located to the north.

The windows in the front of the house were dark, with no life seeming to be present on the inside. Snape indicated to Boot and Spinks that they should head around the house to the right, whilst he went left.

Around the left side of the house, Snape found that a stone wall a good ten feet in height stretched on for quite a way. It seemed that the cottage had quite a bit of land behind it that the owner wanted kept private. Walking along the wall to see if there was a way in, Snape eventually came across a wooden gate.

He put a quick silencing charm on the rusty handle, and another spell opened the gate silently.

Snape had barely made it two steps before he trod in something unpleasant. Cow dung, it seemed.

Looking around it became apparent that the owner of the house was into self-sufficiency. The rather large expanse of land behind the

house had been split into several areas; in one three polytunnels and several greenhouses stood proud, catching the sunlight and providing ideal conditions for various fruits and vegetables to grow. Before then sat a vast vegetable patch, most of the summer crop having been picked by now or dying back.

There was also an area full of trees, obviously an orchard, and several pens containing animals; a good dozen sheep and two alpacas, a couple of pigs in a sty, a goat and several dozen chickens. And in a small pond there were ducks.

Snape was currently standing in an area that appeared to be reserved for cows; four of them to be precise, and all of them were currently looking at him rather strangely.

Quickly making his way over to the fence on the opposite side of the cow pen, Snape wasted no time in climbing over it and making his way closer to the cottage. Briefly he noted Boot and Spinks hopping over the wall on the other side of the grounds.

The first building that Snape came to was not the cottage, but rather a set of stables. At least six horses were here, munching on straw. On the ground of the stable yard there were a couple of plastic buckets, and there was an old metal trough leading up against a wall, next to a brush, a rake, a shovel and a wheelbarrow. Just around the corner from them was a dung heap. Looking up Snape noticed a ginger cat walking across the roof.

A small door stood ajar, its white paint peeling in places. Snape approached and eased it open. It was dark and gloomy inside. A broken down old washing machine stood in the corner, looking like it had been there for a long time. A bicycle with its front wheel and chain missing was leant against the wall near it. An old wooden unit sat against the opposite wall. The top was covered in nails, screws, nuts and bolts. There were a few squirt bottles labelled WD40, and a lump hammer, a few screwdrivers, a claw hammer and a ball of string.

Finding nothing of interest in the room apart from cobwebs, Snape turned to leave. He froze, though, upon catching a glimpse of his reflection in a grimy old mirror hung on the wall. That should not have been possible; his disillusionment charm should have prevented it.

Then it occurred to him; just now he had seen Boot and Spinks climbing over the wall; their disillusionment charms should have prevented him from seeing them, especially from that distance.

Realising that all of their charms had worn off for some reason, Snape drew his wand to cast the spell again.

Before he could utter the incantation, however, he felt something cold and metal press against the back of his neck.

"Put the wand down, and hold your hands where I can see them."

Severus Snape was not as ignorant of the Muggle world as some might think. He was well aware of the fact that the thing currently being pressed into the back of his neck was most likely a gun. He was also well aware of what would happen to him if the person holding to gun to the back of his neck were to pull the trigger.

Rather liking being alive, Snape promptly dropped his wand and held his hands up into the air.

"On your knees."

Snape obeyed.

The gun-toting man circled him until he was standing in front of Snape, who heard a chuckle.

"And what would my old potions master be doing here of all places just before noon on a weekday?"

Snape looked up, straight into the double-barrels of the shotgun.

Looking past the gun, Snape's eyes came to rest upon the owner of the weapon.

A Potter if he ever saw one.

"I'm waiting." the man snarled.

Snape had just opened his mouth to say something when there was a disturbance over by the door.

"Snape, we-" began Spinks before a loud bang cut him off, and the young man dropped to the ground dead.

Boot, covered in Spinks' blood quickly grabbed a hold of the emergency port key that hung from a piece of string around his neck and promptly vanished.

Taking that as a good idea, Snape grabbed his wand as he activated his own port key, hoping to get away before Potter turned his gun back to him.

The last thing Snape heard as he felt the port key's familiar tug behind the navel was that of a second gunshot.

A/N: Well I think that it is fair to leave it there. I've brought the Goblins into this story, and I've finally revealed where Harry is, and we've seen him. That's got to be good enough for now. I know that none of this really resolves any issues, but hey, that's why this is a multi-chaptered story. I'm writing a story that I want to read (which is kind of the reason we have fanfiction in the first place) It is great that so many of you enjoy this story, but if you don't, I don't worry. Let me know either way (but please don't flame me).



## Chapter 7: Harry.

Harry James Potter was a man who was rather pleased with his home. The one-hundred and twenty year old cottage in which he lived had a very comfy feel to it; it was warm and just felt safe. The spacious living room was furnished with a comfy squashy sofa, and an even comfier over-stuffed armchair. A modestly sized television sat on a small table in the corner (he had not liking for those 42 inch plasma monstrosities) and a DVD player was hooked up to it. Along two walls sat bookcases, standing from floor to ceiling, each one stacked with many books of all shapes and sizes, covering a wide range of topics.

Against another wall sat a desk and chair, in which sat a desktop computer. It was a few years out of date, and a little on the slow side, but it did what Harry needed it too. A telephone sat on the desk next to the computer.

The whole room was warmed by a wood-burner. They were so much safer than an open fire, and you got a lot more heat out of them too; if he put enough wood in, he could heat the whole house within no time, and the wood lasted a lot longer. Plus he could heat his boiler with it, so he did not have to pay those extortionate gas bills, and he saved a lot on his electricity bills (just a few months ago Harry had noticed in the paper that gas, electricity and petrol prices had gone up yet again, and the bloody coalition government could not work out why no one was spending!)

The kitchen was a smaller room, consisting of a small fridge/freezer, a sink, a few cupboards, a pantry, a small dinner table and a small stove; all of which easily did the jobs that he required of them.

The main bedroom was smaller than the living room, but larger than the kitchen. A comfy double bed sat snugly against one wall with a bedside table next to it, and a narrow wardrobe and small chest-of-drawers sat side by side against the wall opposite.

A smaller bedroom was located next to the main one; this one furnished the same, but with a single bed rather than a double.

And then there was the bathroom, small and simple with a toilet, wash basin and a bath.

But it was what lay outside the cottage that was the real gem.

Twenty acres of land walled off from the rest of the world. The land was divided by fences, separating different areas off from one-another.

There was the vegetable plot, consisting of eight good-sized beds where Harry grew vegetables like carrots, runner beans, potatoes and cabbages, and there was a patch for strawberries. One bed was devoted to growing flowers, like daffodils and even a dozen or so sunflowers in the summer months.

Behind the vegetable plot were the polytunnels and greenhouses. It was from these that Harry brought on his vegetables and flowers from seeds. Also Harry found that the tomato plants and cucumbers did better on the inside, and once all the other plants were planted out, the polytunnels and greenhouses were converted over to growing these crops.

Nearby there was a small orchard which mostly grew apples, but there were also a couple of pear trees, and a well-maintained line of bushes which produced a good yield of blackberries.

In another area there were cows. Four to be precise; Daisy, Buttercup, Clover and Gertrude. Only the most original names for Harry's animals. These cows were not for milking, rather they were there to breed from; a local farmer was more than happy to bring his prized bull over to service them, so long as he got a cut of the profit, which Harry did not mind at all. The calves would be born, reared up to a good size and then sent off for the chop, as the farmer so eloquently put it. Harry never named the young ones; never paid to get too attached.

There was a pigsty, consisting on several pigs waiting to be fattened up and sent to the slaughter. Harry had no names for these either.

In another paddock were the sheep, a dozen of them. They were for wool, though their meat from their lambs regularly brought in good money. Harry had not named the sheep either, they just never struck him as animals that should have names, they all looked the same had were rather dumb. The two alpacas that shared their paddock however, they had names; Gavin and Stacey (yeah, Harry was a fan of the show). The two alpacas mainly provided wool like

the sheep, but were also rather good for protecting the flock, especially when there were lambs about. It did not happen often due to the high wall, but once in a while a fox would sneak in looking for a tasty little lamb. For some reason spotting a pair of alpacas always put the foxes off that little plan.

A large pen and coop off to one side housed a grand total of fifty two chickens, there for their eggs and eventually meat. Harry took great pride in being able to call them free range and not be lying about it; where he a battery farmer, Harry could easily get another hundred and fifty to two hundred chickens in the coop, but he did not like that idea much.

A rather large pond sat in the middle of all this. Fed by a small stream that came from God knows where, it was home to several families of ducks, a few fish and some frogs.

And of course, there was Larry the goat. He sort of had a right-to-roam thing going on; he could not get into the fenced off areas, but he wandered along the paths munching on the grass and keeping it all looking reasonably tidy. Harry was looking into getting him a couple of pals, perhaps even a girlfriend.

At the back there was an area for grazing horses, and a canter track. The stables had come with the cottage, but Harry did not really have a use for them, so he rented them out to people nearby who had horses. Letting the animals graze on his land meant that he did not have to cut the grass in that area, and having a canter track for the owners to exercise their animals and practice their riding on meant that he could add an extra tenner a month to the rent.

In addition to the stables there were also several workrooms where Harry kept his tools, spare timber and mowers.

All in all Harry was contented with his little set-up. His produce kept him fed, with more than enough left over to bring in a nice little profit; the eggs, lamb and vegetables being his best money earners, though people seemed to go nuts for his homemade strawberry jam.

One or two people thought that Harry had built this place up by himself from scratch, but they were wrong, at least to a certain extent. The vegetable plots and orchard had been there a long time. When Harry had first come to the area he had lodged in the cottage,

taking the smaller bedroom for his own. An elderly couple had owned the place then; and it was they who had built up the ground work. George and Elsie Bowering had lived in this cottage since they were married at eighteen and had built up the smallholding from scratch. During the war they had turned nearly the whole lot over to producing vegetables.

After the war they had built the stables and reduced the vegetable plot in favour of a few chickens and sheep. Old age, however, eventually caught up with them and, by the time Harry moved in, all the livestock was gone.

Harry had gotten a job in the local shop to pay his way, and often helped out with the gardening and general upkeep of the property, which neither George nor Elsie were able to do too well anymore.

Two years after Harry had moved in, Elsie passed away. She had been battling Alzheimer's for a long while by then but then took a sudden, two month long descent that had been brutal to witness. Both George and Harry had been at her bedside when she passed, each holding one of her hands.

George had not lasted long after that. As unbelievable as it may seem to some people, sometimes when one person goes, their partner will follow soon after. Some say it is from the loss of will to live, but as far as Harry was concerned George had died of a broken heart, just three months after the loss of his beloved Elsie.

To Harry's surprise he ended up in possession of the cottage and its land. George and Elsie had had a son once, but he had died serving in the Falklands.

One evening, about a fortnight after George had passed, Harry had stood out by the back door of the cottage, looking out across the grounds. He could still remember the last thing George had said to him the last time they looked out across the grounds together;

"I wish this old place could be brought back to the way it used to be."

From that evening on, Harry had striven to do just that; and he liked to think that he had succeeded. The place was a little more than a simple small-holding now, and Harry hoped that George and Elsie would be proud of what he had done.

There was one problem with this place though; rats. It was kind of an unwritten law; wherever you have chickens, you will have rats.

The ginger cat that had decided to make its home in one of the stables about a year and a half ago had proven his worth by turning out to be a very capable rat catcher, but sometimes Harry just had to whip out the ol' shotgun and hunt some rats himself.

And that was exactly what he was doing, when an unpleasant blast from the past wandered into one of his workrooms.

News had reached him of his brother's death, and he was certain that it was only a matter of time before someone, either Dumbledore or Voldemort, would come looking for Harry Potter, the brother of The Boy Who Lived.

Seeing Snape sent off alarm bells; the snide, self-involved bastard could be working for anyone, but both Dumbledore and Voldemort were his most likely masters.

Not prepared to be taken down, or taken in by either of those sides, Harry knew that he had to get stop Snape from revealing his location.

A bit of fun putting the fear of God into Snape seemed like the perfect way to begin, and to find out from him what he knew.

Unfortunately the arrival of Snape's two accomplices put a damper on that plan, particularly after Harry shot one of them dead, convinced he was about to be attacked from behind. The second man vanished with a pop almost instantly, and Harry had whirled back around on Snape to see the man about to disappear as well. Acting on instinct, Harry pulled the trigger, and the bullet vanished with Snape.

Harry had spent the next few minutes cursing up a storm before beginning to wonder what to do with the body. He quickly thought of the perfect place.

He dragged it through the stables, past the pigsty, the cows, the pond and the vegetable plot and around the back of the greenhouses to where a small trap door sat. Harry wrenched open the door and shoved the body down the hole.

Shutting the door behind it, Harry stood, wondering what to do next. He had wanted to obliviate Snape and send him on his way, but now one man was dead, Snape was likely dead, and another had seen the whole thing.

Harry knew two things though;

One - it was unlikely that Snape and his companions had found this place by chance; and to find it so soon after Arnold Potter's death meant that it was not through research. The Goblins must have blabbed.

Two- someone, either from the Ministry, the Order or the Death Eaters, or some combination of the three, was likely to be here soon.

Damn it!

A/N: Seems like as good a place as any to stop. There it is; we've met Harry properly. Not much else to say about this chapter, other than express my hope that you enjoyed it.

Look out for more on the way soon.

## Chapter 8: Dumbledore's Try

"!"

That was the terrible noise that interrupted lunch time at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

In an instant, Professors Dumbledore, McGonagall, Flitwick, Sprout, Slughorn, Sinistra, Vector and Babbling were on their feet, running to the huge wooden doors of the Great Hall towards the origin of the noise. Madam Granger and Madam Pomfrey were hot on their heels.

In the Entrance Hall, they found a shocked caretaker, Argus Filch, staring at an equally shocked, and blood covered Terry Boot who was scrambling away from the fallen form of Professor Snape, who seemed to be injured, if all the blood was anything to go by.

Instantly Dumbledore sprang into action, ordering Filch to shut the doors to the Great Hall so that the students could not see what was happening.

Madam Pomfrey quickly began examining Snape for injuries and quickly found one.

"Well?" Dumbledore demanded of the Healer "What's happened?"

"This is a terrible wound." observed Pomfrey before asking of Snape "Who did this to you?"

"One of those Muggle contraptions." said Snape "A gun." he conveniently avoided answering who had shot him.

"How bad is it?" asked McGonagall.

"It's a bloody mess." replied Pomfrey "Fortunately though the wound is in the upper-thigh area, where there are no major organs."

Hermione Granger found herself struggling to keep a straight face as she asked "The upper thigh area?"

"Yes, girl." replied Pomfrey as she began applying charms to remove the bullet "The upper thigh."

"Isn't upper thigh just code for arse?" asked Hermione, the corners of her mouth curving just a little too much. Flitwick, Sprout and Sinistra were all suffering from a similar problem.

Snape gave a displeased growl, aimed in the direction of Hermione and Dumbledore decided to intervene before wands were drawn.

"Madam Granger, please return to the Great Hall and try and keep the students calm, but do not tell them what has happened. Aurora, Pomona, Septima, Horace, Bathsheba, if you could go with her? Filius, perhaps you could escort your former pupil to the Hospital Wing and maybe find him a calming draught?"

Hermione scowled at the headmaster for ruining her fun, but nonetheless she led the way back into the Great Hall. Some people might have thought that it would bother her that he referred to her by her title and surname, rather than her given name like he had done with the other teachers, but it did not bother her in the slightest. For him to use her given name would give the impression that they were on familiar terms, which they most certainly were not.

Hermione loathed Dumbledore for many reasons, not least of which was how he had let the standards at the school slide. History of Magic was, and still is, considered by all but the most studious of students as nap time; Divination was a joke and any class taught by Snape was guaranteed to be pure torture for any student not in Slytherin house. And of course, there was Muggle Studies. Dumbledore supposedly wanted to stamp out bigotry towards Muggles and Muggle-borns, so why he had allowed the Muggle Studies course to slip so far behind was anyone's guess.

Then there was Slytherin house. Granted some of those within were alright, but others seemed able to get away with murder, and many of them were more than willing to do so. Most of them received no punishment for doing things that students in other houses would get a one-hundred point deduction and a month's worth of detentions for. Whenever the issue was brought up with Dumbledore, he always deferred to Snape, often repeating how he trusted the man.

Too bad for Snape, very few others did.

Speaking of Snape...



"Can I have your attention please?" Hermione asked the student body at large, quietening them all down. Once she had their attention she continued.

"I'm sure that you are all wondering what that commotion was about, but I can assure you that it is nothing. Professor Snape had received a small injury to his upper thigh area and is being a bit of a baby about it, nothing at all to worry about."

"Upper thigh area?" asked Millie Jenkins, a Hufflepuff.

"Sounds like Snape got hurt in the arse." laughed Daniel Wood, a Gryffindor.

Suddenly the whole hall was filled with a roar of excitement as students began turning to each other to discuss theories as to just how the much loathed Professor Snape received his arse-injury.

Job done, Hermione allowed herself a self-satisfied smile and returned to her seat at the head table. Picking up her fork, she did not need to look at Sinistra to know the older Astronomy Professor was giving her an incredulous look.

"Don't judge me." said Hermione, before placing a forkful of her salad into her mouth

After the bullet was removed and the wound healed by Madam Pomfrey, Snape was moved to the Hospital Wing. When they arrived Terry had already taken a calming draught and was sat on one of the beds. Snape was quickly placed into the one next to him.

"What happened?" asked Dumbledore.

"Potter didn't take too kindly to Wizards snooping around his property." answered Snape.

"Surely you thought to use disillusionment charms." exclaimed McGonagall.

"Of course I did." snapped Snape "For some reason they wore off. I suspect that there was a revealing ward around the property."

"So he shot you on sight?" asked Dumbledore.

"No." replied Snape "He threatened me and forced me to kneel. Then Boot and Spinks came in and Potter turned and shot Spinks. Boot used his port key to escape, and I mirrored him. Potter shot me just as I was leaving."

"And what of Spinks?" asked Flitwick.

"Dead." replied Terry "Bullet went straight through his skull."

Those gathered remained silent as the implications sank in. They had found Harry Potter, but their first contact had been disastrous. Harry Potter clearly wanted nothing to do with wizards, and had set up ways to detect them. Now he had killed one of them; whether this was intentional or not was not clear; but it was done.

"Severus." said Dumbledore "Would you allow me access to your memory? I'd like to go and have a word with young Harry personally."

Snape nodded and allowed Dumbledore to use Legillimency to view the memory of Harry Potter's home.

Memory at the front of his mind, Dumbledore left the school and, once he was past the ward line, he disappeared.

One moment he was standing just beyond the edge of the Hogwarts ward boundary, the next he was ricocheting off of another set of wards.

The ground came towards him rapidly before all went dark.

When Dumbledore had collided with the wards around Harry Potter's property, a loud gong sounded across the grounds, startling a few of the animals.

Down on the canter-track, two of the girls from the village were sat on their horses trotting around under the watchful eyes of their mother when the sound rang out.

Both horses were slightly startled, but were calmed relatively quickly by the two girls. Their mother made her way over to the nearby chicken coop, where Harry was scattering a little corn for the birds.

"What was that noise Harry?" she asked.

"I'm not sure. Maybe the cows have knocked their water trough over again." Harry replied as he exited the chicken coop.

"Alright." replied the mother "We're going to be leaving in a minute. Are you alright to put the horses away if we leave them out grazing?"

"No problem." replied Harry as he headed off in the direction of the cow paddock.

Instead of checking on them, however, Harry headed into the stable yard and then one of the sheds. Inside there was an old tarpaulin sheet draped over something. Harry pulled the tarpaulin off and began examining what lay beneath.

It was a large boulder that had been carved into a perfect sphere. On this were engraved countless runic symbols. This was the keystone that anchored all the wards around his property into place.

Harry drew his wand from his pocket and tapped a few of the runes until a ghostly image appeared above the sphere.

Harry studied it carefully, a smirk quickly forming on his face.

"So it's you then Dumbledore? Very well..."

Dazed and confused, Albus Dumbledore managed to find his feet and stand up. Looking around he spotted the cottage home of Harry Potter in the distance. Realising that he had bounced off of anti-apparition wards, Dumbledore decided that it was best to make the rest of the journey on foot.

After a long walk, Dumbledore approached the front door of the cottage and knocked.

Nothing.

He knocked again.

Still nothing.

He moved to the side of the door and looked through the living room window.

There was no one in there.

He went back to the door and grabbed the handle.

The door was locked.

Dumbledore whipped out his wand and sent an unlocking charm at the door handle.

The handle glowed white for a second before it faded. Satisfied that the spell had worked, Dumbledore reached out and grabbed the handle again, only to be thrown back fifty feet by a pulse of magic that surged painfully through him.

Once again getting back to his feet, though much slower than last time, Dumbledore was very tempted to throw a bombardment hex at the door, but he quickly decided against such an action. If what happened to him just a moment ago was what happened when the door was hit by an unlocking charm, what the hell would happen to him if he tried blasting the thing apart?

Instead he turned and tried Severus' approach: from the side. Unfortunately for him, he picked the wrong side and, not being as youthful as he once was, he was unable to climb the wall to get in, and he was certainly reluctant to try any more magic unless he absolutely had to. In the end he wound up walking around nearly the entire perimeter of the property before finding the gate. Just as he was reaching out to try and open it, the latch clicked.

Reacting on instinct, Dumbledore gave a quick wave of his wand and vanished beneath a disillusionment spell and then stood to the side.

A woman in her early thirties, and two girls aged around ten exited through the gate.

"Don't worry you two." said the woman "We'll come back in a few days."

"But we want to stay." protested one of the girls.

"But we can't." said the mother.

"Why not?" demanded the other girl "We can stay riding the horses, and you can keep one eye on us and one on Harry." There was a teasing tone to her voice as she said that last bit.

The first girl giggled and said "Mummy, you should ask him out like you want to. Then you can marry him and we can live here and ride the horses any time we want."

"I don't think that that is a very good idea." replied the mother.

"Why?" asked both girls in unison.

"Well for one, I doubt that Harry's girlfriend will be too pleased with that, and two, I doubt that your father would be too pleased, either."

As the trio got further and further away, Dumbledore filed away the knowledge that he had obtained.

Clearly Harry had what would be called a riding school going on, inviting people to his property to practice riding horses. Also Harry apparently had a girlfriend; that could be useful in persuading the young man to fight Voldemort.

Now that the trio were safely out of sight, Dumbledore reached for the gate.

And was promptly thrown a large distance away.

For the third time that day, Dumbledore found himself pushing his ancient body aching to his feet. Looking up at the cottage and the walled off land behind it, Dumbledore decided it best to return to Hogwarts and regroup.

All this being thrown through the air was beginning to hurt.

As he disappeared back to Hogwarts, he never noticed the eyes watching him from a small window on the side of the cottage.

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Severus Snape remained in the Hospital wing for the rest of the day, and that night. The next morning, however, he was back on his feet and swept into the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom with the same air of superiority that he always did. Reaching the front he turned and saw the fourth year Ravenclaws and Gryffindors looking at him with highly amused expressions. Some seemed to be holding back laughter.

His eyes immediately locked onto Adam Jones, a Gryffindor.

"Jones, would you mind explaining to me what is so funny?"

"Nothing sir." replied Jones, trying desperately to keep a straight face "But seeing as we're asking questions; how's your arse been?"

That did it. The entire classroom was filled with raucous laughter as Snape's eyes flared dangerously.

"What was that, Mr Jones?"

Reigning in his laughter, Adam Jones asked again "How's your arse been."

A vein on Snape's forehead looked like it was about to explode as his mind made the connection. Anger surged through him as his mind went to the person most likely to have told.

All lessons in nearby classrooms came to a halt as a bellow of rage echoed through the castle.

"DAMN YOU GRANGER!"

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A/N: So I think that that will do for this chapter. Now we know what happened to Snape, we have seen a little of how Harry defends his

home and we have seen that Hermione is a little bit of a trouble-maker, especially for Snape. More to come on that front.

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed it, there's more coming soon!

## Chapter 9: Luna

The Head of Creature Liaison; that was her job title. The Head of Creature Liaison; that is what she was. Her department, as the title suggested, aimed to set up communications between Wizarding society and various magical creatures from around the world, including, but not limited to, Centaurs, Goblins, Vampires, Giants, Trolls, Werewolves, Sphinxes and Merpeople. It was a tough job, but Luna Lovegood loved it, and could not think of anything she would enjoy doing more. The people that she worked with were some of the best, and the amount of progress they had made in the past five years alone was outstanding.

Why in the past year alone, they had, acting on the behalf of the Forbidden Forest Centaur herd, successfully persuaded the Minister for Magic to allow the Centaurs more area in which to roam. In return the Centaurs had promised to make peace with the Forest Trolls in the area, and to try and pave the way for Luna's department to communicate with them, which was crucial preventing them from joining with Lord Voldemort, like around sixty percent of the Mountain Trolls of the area had already done.

Open up communications and keep them on side; that was the job of Luna's department. Even if that just meant keeping the creatures neutral in the war, the effort involved was worth it.

There were, of course, downsides. Like right now, with the situation with the Hobgoblins of Yester Castle in Scotland. These Hobgoblins once followed Sir Hugo de Giffard, known as the Wizard of Yester; a powerful warlock and necromancer. To most of the world, both magical and mundane, Yester Castle was now little more than a ruin deemed worthy enough by the Muggle world to be named a Scheduled Ancient Monument by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, but apart from that it held little significance. Luna and her team, however, knew different. Through extensive research, they had found that, like Hogwarts Castle, people saw what those inside wanted them to see. If Muggles got too close to Hogwarts, all they was a moldering ruin, and the same went for Yester Castle.

Sir Hugo de Giffard may be long dead, but the descendants of the Hobgoblins who served him still remained there, and it was to them that Luna had sent a team in the hopes of opening up talks with



them. The team had been led by one of Luna's best operatives; Sally-Anne Perks, and contained Fay Dunbar, Morag and Katherine MacDougal, Wayne Hopkins and his brother Carl, Stephen Cornfoot and his sister Louise, and Ritchie Coote. They were the best that Luna could give to the situation, and yet they had failed to set up any form of communication.

According to the report that Luna was now reading, the Hobgoblins had been hostile from the start, and after three days of trying, the group had been forced to retreat with Katherine, Stephen and Ritchie injured. Given how the Hobgoblins, themselves necromancers, had begun a ritual to raise dead bodies from the grave, Luna could not hold the decision to retreat against the team. The last thing that she needed was her people getting killed.

Luna knew from past experience that for now it would be best to retreat and regroup. They would have to leave the Hobgoblins alone for at least a few months before trying again. Any sooner would guarantee hostility. They would have to keep an eye on the place however, even if only to make sure Lord Voldemort did not make a successful play for them; Hobgoblins with the ability to raise many Inferi from their graves in just a few minutes was the last thing the Wizarding World needed Voldemort to have.

Luna set Sally-Anne's report down on her desk and then rubbed her eyes wearily. Seriously, she did love her job, but she was often left wondering why every peace treaty and/or pledge of allegiance could not be as easily obtained as getting the one from the Satyrs of Greece had been. Just once she would like a mission to be as easy. Just once.

A knock on her door interrupted her thoughts, and she looked up and called for the person to enter.

It was Padma Patil.

Luna smiled serenely at her "Good evening, Padma. I didn't realise that you had come back from India."

"International Port key dropped me off at the Ministry about fifteen minutes ago." replied Padma, eyeing the mess of papers and reports on Luna's desk "Not caught you at a bad moment, have I?"

"No, no" replied Luna, hurriedly trying to sort the mess on her desk into some sort of semblance of order "Just going over a few reports, that's all."

Padma leaned down and picked up a sheet of parchment that had fallen to the floor. Noticing the writing, she asked "Hobgoblins of Yester Castle."

"Hmm." Luna grumbled "We've been trying to recruit them, or at least get them not to join Voldemort."

Padma chuckled and said "Luna, that's always our job. You're not having a lot of luck with them, I take it?"

"No," replied Luna "They're still heavily devoted to Sir Hugo de Giffard, even so long after his death. They did not take too kindly to the arrival of the team I sent up there to negotiate. But I've had enough of Hobgoblins for one day. How was India? Did you have any luck?"

Padma gave a smile "India was lovely, as ever. But as to luck, I'm afraid I'll have to give you a bit more bad news. The Monocoli people wanted nothing to do with us, and it is impossible to communicate with either the Occamies or the Nagas without someone who can speak parseltongue, and we could find no one with that gift."

Luna's brow furrowed in confusion "But I thought speakers of parseltongue were more common in India, and that the trait was an admired one, rather than despised as it is here."

Padma nodded "That is true, of course, but perhaps I should rephrase what I said; we could find no one with the gift of parseltongue who was willing to work with us. Of Indian descent I may be, but the Wizards and Witches over there can tell that I was born and raised here in Britain. As such, they viewed me as someone not to be trusted, and that made meeting with someone as admired as a parselmouth impossible. For some of the looks I was getting, I might as well have been the British Minister for Magic wandering around the streets, spouting off his usual, highly offensive waffle."

Luna nodded; a thoughtful expression on her face. Magical Britain's relationship with Magical India was at an all-time low, thanks to berks like Cornelius Oswald Fudge and his ilk. Rather a shame, really. And not at all helpful for Luna's department, either.

"Well," said Luna "I'm pretty sure I know where I can obtain the services of a parselmouth, so a return trip might be in order soon. As for the Monocoli people..." she trailed off, unsure as to what to suggest with regards to the curious, virtually unknown race of single-legged people.

Padma nodded and then continued "I do have some more news though. Whilst searching for the Monocoli, we came across these."

She reached into her robes and pulled out a collection of photographs, which she handed to Luna. The blond witch's pale eyebrows rose up high as her pale blue eyes widened in surprise.

"Well that's interesting." she remarked, before looking up to meet Padma's eyes "But these pictures were clearly taken in the daytime."

"They do not transform, so they do not rely on the moon." replied Padma.

"They're like this the whole time?" asked Luna, receiving a nod from the Indian witch.

Luna looked back down at the photographs.

"That's very interesting."

After looking through all the photographs, Luna turned her attention back to Padma.

"How many are there?"

"We counted six." answered Padma "But it was obvious that there are more, somewhere. When we got back to the town after our unsuccessful meeting with the Monocoli and asked around. Apparently they are poached in the same way that their non-magical counterparts are poached by the Muggles."

"Would they be approachable, do you think?" queried Luna.

"Possibly." replied Padma "Though, seeing as they don't transform, we'll need a way to speak to them in their language."

"Felidspeak." Luna muttered, and Padma nodded.

After a few moments of silence, Luna stood "Alright, we'll worry about that tomorrow. You go home and get some rest; I'll go and convince our parselmouth to make a trip to India."

Padma smirked "Well, don't go getting too distracted by his flickering tongue tonight. Oh, who am I kidding, you get all the fun out of him that you can, and then give him my address, would you? I could do with his talents tonight."

Luna rolled her eyes at her long-time friend as she gave a wave of her wand to pack everything away before slinging her work bag onto her shoulder.

"I'll see you in the morning, Padma." she said, heading towards the door.

"Was that a 'yeah' or a 'no' on the sending him my way?" Padma called after her.

"Good night, Padma." Luna called back.

Padma grinned as she watched her long-time friend and colleague leave. Luna Lovegood certainly had come a long way from the spacey girl who had first entered Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and wizardry twenty years ago. That was due in no small part to the wonderful group of friends that had happily taken her under their wing. Padma was proud to be able to admit that she was amongst that group, having been one of the first to be swept up into it when it first formed back in her first year. Luna, like Padma and a good number of others had flourished in that group, and it was in that group that Luna first met her serpent-speaking boyfriend.

With a wistful sigh, Padma left Luna's office, silently wishing that she could hurry up and attract the attentions of Mr Right.

The front door opened and Luna Lovegood stepped inside. She set her bag down by the door as she shut it behind her and then walked through the cosy living room and into the kitchen, where the tantalising aromas of dinner filled the air. It smelled like they were having lamb tonight.

Suddenly a pair of arms wrapped around her from behind and a pair of lips pressed against her neck.

"Welcome home, my Moonbeam." the voice of her boyfriend spoke into her ear.

Luna grinned at his behaviour "And a very good evening to you too, Harry."

A/N: And I'll stop things there. I get the feeling that some of my reviewers won't like this turn of events, but bear with me, everything will be explained eventually. Sorry for this taking so long to get out, but I've been a little stuck for inspiration on this story, no matter how much the many fantastic reviews helped. Also those little things called ideas for other stories keep jumping in the way every time I sit down and try to write this. As such, I now have many half-formed first chapters waiting to be developed further on file. You can look forward to reading some, if to all of them... some when... someday... at some point in time.

## Chapter 10: Aspen, Talks and Death

Severus Snape was in a very bad mood. All day today he had had to put up with the insufferable brats of Gryffindor, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff asking him that stupid question "How's your arse been?" and he was sick of it. He already put no fewer than sixty students in detention, but that did nothing to stop them. Hufflepuff house had lost more than five-hundred points over this, Ravenclaw had lost more than six-hundred, and Gryffindor almost double that, and yet still the brats continued to ask the question.

Worse was the fact that he just knew that Granger woman was behind this, and he had yet to see her all day. But now it was dinner time, and Snape knew Granger would be at dinner. His hope was that if he called her out on it in the middle of dinner, the Headmaster would severely admonish her in front of the entire student body, thus curbing her behaviour towards him. At no point did he stop to wonder just when he had become little more than a tattletale who relied on Professor Dumbledore to fight his quarrels with the other Professors for him.

So it was that the utterly furious Severus Snape stormed into the Great Hall during the middle of dinner and bellowed "Granger! I want a word with you!"

Madam Hermione Granger turned from her conversation with Professor Vector to look at the enraged man storming between the house tables towards her, his black robes billowing behind him.

"And just what would you like a word with me about?" she asked calmly.

"You know damn well what it is about." snapped Snape.

"No, I'm afraid I don't." replied Hermione "Would you care to enlighten me? Or would you prefer to just stand there and seethe?"

"Severus, whatever is the matter?" asked Dumbledore.

Snape raised an accusatory finger and pointed it at Hermione "That woman has been spreading malicious stories about me to the students and I demand that she stop."

Hermione raised an eyebrow at the accusation and asked "And can you actually prove that claim?"

"The students have been making fun of my injury all day." replied Snape.

"And what exactly have they been saying?" asked McGonagall.

"They have..." snarled Snape "They have been asking how a certain part of my anatomy has been."

That raised a few eyebrows amongst the staff, and generated laughter from the students.

"Their exact wording?" asked McGonagall, over the noise of the laughter.

"How's your arse been?" quoted Snape, angrily.

This caused Hermione to break out into derisive laughter "Oh, for goodness' sake Professor Snape. For someone who works with students, you sure are naïve about them."

"What?" growled Snape.

"Oh, honestly." sighed Hermione "They are not asking anything like "how has your arse been". They are asking "how is your aspen." It's a saying."

"Please explain, Madam Granger." requested Dumbledore.

Hermione rolled her eyes, but explained anyway "As you should know, what with the continuing war against Voldemort, attacks by Werewolves and Vampires are currently at an all-time high. And, as any competent Defence teacher will tell you, one of the most effective measures for killing both a Werewolf and a Vampire is a wooden stake taken from an aspen tree. Thus the saying "how's your aspen" refers to the rather sensible idea that everyone should carry an stake of aspen wood on them at all times, and know that it is in good condition so that in the event of an attack by a Werewolf or Vampire, you can defend yourself. "How's your aspen" is a friendly greeting, showing concern at the safety of others, not an

insult as you seem to have taken it, Professor Snape. I suggest that any punishments that you have handed out over this should be amended, as you should not punish those concerned for your wellbeing."

"Ah, the imagination of youth." said Dumbledore, completely lapping up Hermione's cock-and-bull story. He turned to address the students "Such concern for each other's wellbeing is refreshing to see. Of course, all detentions given over this misunderstanding will be dropped and all house points taken shall be returned. In fact, all those who were kind enough to ask this question, take twenty points each for every time you asked."

Outside the Great Hall, the house point hour glasses for Gryffindor, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff began a rapid relocation of their red, blue and yellow gems as the house point totals for those three houses skyrocketed to numbers never seen before.

Dumbledore turned to Snape "Now, Severus, I believe that you owe Madam Granger an apology."

Severus Snape was seething. It looked like the throbbing vein in his forehead would explode at any moment.

Looking around, he saw that he would get no support from the rest of the staff.

It was clear that he would get none from the students either; the Gryffindors, Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs were all watching eagerly to see if the head of Slytherin would apologise, and the Slytherin students had learnt long ago to say nothing bad about the school's best loved, and only, Muggle-born teacher.

With a rather unpleasant sneer on his face, Snape offered "I apologise, Miss Granger. It appears I was mistaken."

As he moved to take his seat, the fact that he refused to refer to her by her proper title was not lost on anyone. Hermione Granger, however, was prepared to offer the same in kind.

"Not at all Snape. Though I must say that your belief that the students were referring to your arse points to worryingly high levels of paranoia on your part. I can assure you that the students know



nothing of your trespassing onto private property and getting shot in the upper thigh for it."

Snape merely grunted in acknowledgement before what she had said truly sunk in.

"GRANGER!"

The hall erupted with noise as the students of Gryffindor, Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff burst into uproarious laughter. Even a few of the Slytherin students had to laugh at that.

Astoria Malfoy, née Greengrass carefully added a few drops of her urine sample into the bubbling cauldron. Almost instantly the thin, clear liquid turned blue.

She was pregnant.

Tom Marvolo Riddle, the self-styled Dark Lord Voldemort, sat at the head of the table in Nott Manor, surveying the faces before him. During the last eighteen years of war, the dark side had suffered many casualties, but with the exception of Crabbe, Lucius and Jugson, all of Voldemort's inner circle were still present, still serving him. Bellatrix was still present, madder than ever, along with her husband and brother in law, Rodolphus and Rabastan. Wormtail was still around too, as cowardly as ever. Barty Crouch Jr. was still present also, having escaped Hogwarts before anyone could realise the imposter Moody's involvement in Voldemort's resurrection. Draco Malfoy had stepped up to take his father's place, whilst Flint and Peucy filled the holes left by Crabbe and Jugson. Also present tonight were Travers, Mulciber, Selwyn, Nott, Macnair, Goyle, Amycus, Alecto, Rookwood, Rowle, Avery, Gibbon, Yaxley, Dolohov, as dangerous as ever, and Snape, the spy in Dumbledore's ranks, who, Voldemort noticed, was not paying attention.

"Is something bothering you, Severus?" he asked

Severus Snape was most annoyed. Not only had his rant at Granger in the Great Hall failed to get her reprimanded, but had resulted in a thoroughly embarrassing situation for him, along with his secret being revealed. Dumbledore had moved to reprimand her then, but McGonagall, Flitwick, Sprout and several other Professors had stood up for the mudblood bint, claiming that her statement would stop the rumour mill as to why he, Snape, was so paranoid about his arse.

And then, to cap it all, shortly after dinner had ended, Snape had felt the dark mark on his arm burn, and now here he was, sitting in the Nott family Manor, amongst the other Death Eaters, privately stewing in his own anger, until the voice of his master broke through his murderous contemplations.

Looking up, he noticed that all eyes were on him; some looking curious, some looking indifferent, some looking absolutely furious that someone in their ranks would not pay attention to what their great master was saying. Thankfully, Lord Voldemort seemed to be in that first group.

"Just pondering, my Lord." replied Snape evasively.

Voldemort tilted his head to the side, as though pondering his next move. He seemed almost child-like.

"Pondering what, Severus?"

Snape thought hard for an answer. The Dark Lord surely would be displeased to learn that he had been choosing to stew over a lost argument with a mudblood than pay attention to his words.

Then it came to him, the perfect answer, and, hopefully, the solution to his problems with the Granger bint.

"My Lord, I was just trying to figure out the best time to advise an attack on the mudblood Hermione Granger."

That roused the lot of them, and the answer certainly seemed to sit well with the Dark Lord.

"Continue, Severus."

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The following morning, Luna arrived in her office at her normal time, and asked her assistant, Laura Madley, a former Hufflepuff, to contact Padma Patil and Sally-Anne Perks for her.

Ten minutes later, both women arrived together.

"Good morning, ladies." Luna greeted them brightly "How are we this fine morning?"

Padma smirked "Somebody got some last night, I see."

"Lucky cow." Sally-Anne grumbled good naturedly, her own smile taking any sting out of her words.

Luna rolled her eyes "Sorry ladies, but we are not here to discuss my sex life.

Padma turned to Sally-Anne "She got some."

"Definitely." replied Sally-Anne with a nod.

Luna gave a playful sigh "Alright, I got some last night, and as usual it was bloody fantastic, now can we drop it please? I have some things to tell you that are rather important."

"Go ahead." said Sally-Anne, taking a seat.

"We're done." added Padma, taking the seat next to her colleague.

Luna sat behind her desk and fished some sheets of parchment out of her bag before handing them out "I received word from Su Li early this morning. It seems she is having a touch more luck in China than we've had in Britain and India put together."

Both Padma and Sally-Anne began scanning the reports that they had been handed.

"An accord struck with the Fenghuang? Aren't those the birds of good omen?" asked Padma.

Luna smiled "They certainly are. And hopefully we can take this as a sign of good omen ourselves."

"Qilin?" asked Sally-Anne "The Chinese cousin of the Unicorn?"

"Yes." replied Luna "I am most surprised that Su Li was able to set up communications with them. I'm even more surprised that they are willing to come to our aid should we need it."

"She's really outdone herself." observed Padma "Hey, look. She's even managed to get the rain bringing bird, the Shangyand to agree to talks."

Sally-Anne scanned further down the report "Hmm. It seems, though, that she will need a parselmouth to speak with the Chinese Fireball Dragons."

"Speaking of parcelmouths," began Padma, turning to Luna "what did Harry say about India?"

"That's the other thing I wanted to talk to you two about." replied Luna "He wants to know more about what the situation in India is, and also wants to know more about what is going on elsewhere. I thought that the three of us could meet up with him after work and discuss things with him."

"Alright." agreed Sally-Anne.

"Sounds good." added Padma with a nod.

"Glad you're in agreement." said Luna "Because this means that both of you are going to have to have a desk day."

"Ah crap." groaned both women in unison.

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Severus Snape was so happy that he was practically skipping as he made his way down to Hogsmeade. Lord Voldemort had been most agreeable to an attack on Hermione Granger. The permanent removal of such a well-respected mudblood was just the thing to

remind the Wizarding World just how powerful the pure-blood elitists were.

What's more, Albus Dumbledore had agreed to this too when Snape had told him of it. Dumbledore believed that the death of Hermione Granger would not only see to the continued safety of Snape's position of spy within Voldemort's ranks, but also rally the light side to reunite to fight Voldemort, preferably with Dumbledore as its glorious leader.

Even better, they only had to wait until the evening following the meeting with Voldemort to launch the attack, as Granger had informed Dumbledore that she would be leaving the school to travel to Hogsmeade where she would floo from the Three Broomsticks to the home of her male companion.

Little did she know; Hogsmeade was as far as she would get.

Which was why now, half an hour before Hermione Granger was due to leave Hogwarts for what would be the last time, Severus Snape was making his way to Hogsmeade, where he and others would launch their attack from behind the bookshop Tomes and Scrolls.

Voldemort had allowed Snape to choose his own accomplices in this attack. Bellatrix had been most vocal in her desire to be a part of the assassination of Granger, but Snape decided to go for those a little more stable. From the Inner Circle, he had invited Alecto, Goyle and Gibbon. Bole, Warrington and Derrick added to their numbers, bringing the total number of Death Eaters up to the magically powerful number of seven. The addition of two Werewolves, Kessler and McDermott only added to their strength. Severus Snape did not think that Hermione Granger was all that powerful, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

Snape arrived behind the bookshop, and found the others there.

"We make this quick." he informed them "We kill her, and then get out. Once she is dead, all of you will retreat to Nott manor, and I'll make my way back up to the school under a disillusionment charm."

The others nodded and turned to watch the road that led up to the school.

Not long later, the two werewolves raised their heads, sniffing the air.

"Someone comes." observed Kessler.

"Is it her?" asked Alecto.

Snape peered out around the side of the shop and saw a figure approaching.

"She's early." he observed "Masks on."

Hermione Granger made her way down the street, heading towards the Three Broomsticks Inn, from which she intended to Floo to the home of her boyfriend. As she neared the Tomes and Scrolls bookshop however, she sensed a change in the air. One thing she had learnt over the years was to sense the subtle changes in the air that seemed to warn of danger. Subtly she drew her wand and continued walking.

Suddenly three figures dressed in black cloaks and wearing masks blocked her way forward. Each had their wand raised, but Hermione was faster. A brandish of her wand brought a fire-whip into existence which decapitated two of the Death Eaters and severely injured the third.

"Avada Kedavra!" shouted a voice behind her. Hermione threw herself to the ground to avoid the killing curse and spun around to throw a borderline dark version of the cutting curse at her attacker, cutting his wand arm off and slicing his chest open.

"Avada Kedavra!" shouted another Death Eater, this one with a female voice. Hermione rolled to avoid this curse and sent an over-powered piercing hex at the dark witch, blowing a hole in her stomach. The wizard behind her was on the receiving end of a blasting hex that blew apart his head before he could cast a curse.

Two more attacked. Though it was not the night of the full moon, it was painfully obvious that both men were Werewolves.

Another borderline dark cutting curse slowed one of them down, but the other one leapt at her. Hermione spun and in one fluid movement she avoided the attack, drew a stake of aspen wood from

within her robed and drove it hard into the side of the Werewolf who howled in pain before dropping to the ground in agony, the stake still sticking out from his side.

The second Werewolf moved to attack, but by that time Hermione had used her wand to conjure and fire a silver dagger which pierced the Werewolf through the head, right between the eyes.

Hermione turned back to the first Werewolf and, with a slashing gesture with her wand, she ended the creature's pitiful existence.

Severus Snape had remained hidden and unnoticed behind the shop during all of this, hoping to be able to deny being involved in the attack should any of the others get caught. He had gotten his wish; the confrontation was a quick one: the whole thing was over within twenty five seconds. Unfortunately the outcome was not what he had hoped for: Gibbon and Bole had been decapitated, Warrington's head had been blown apart, Goyle's neck had been opened up with a deep cut, Alecko's stomach and intestines were now on the outside of her body and Derrick's arm was missing and his chest was cut open, both Werewolves were dead, and Hermione Granger was still alive.

Snape knew that his fate was sealed: he was a dead man. If he retreated now, he would likely die from Voldemort's wrath at the death of eight of his followers; if he stayed and fought, Granger was likely to kill him too. Odds were death by Granger would be over a lot faster than the punishment Voldemort would subject him too before death, so Snape stepped out and fired a killing curse.

Apparently someone in Hogsmeade had heard the commotion and seen fit to summon the Aurors, who arrived headed by Amelia Bones and Rufus Scrimgeour just in time to see Hermione Granger spin out of the way of Snape's killing curse. She responded as she had done against Derrick, but Snape managed to get a shield up to protect himself against the deadly cutter. Hermione Granger, however, was not to be beaten.

"Accio dagger!" she cried.

Snape had unknowingly stepped between Granger and the body of McDermott, and when Hermione cast her spell, the silver dagger

that she had conjured earlier slid out of the Werewolf's skull and raced towards Snape, piercing through the flesh of his lower back.

Snape yelled in pain and sank to his knees. Hermione cast a blasting curse that destroyed both Snape's wand and his wand had before striking him with a body-bind curse.

It was at this point that Dumbledore arrived, accompanied by McGonagall and Flitwick. The two heads of house had no idea as to the real reason why they were there, but Dumbledore knew. It was his plan to arrive just as Madam Granger was killed and personally apprehend some of the killers and get Snape out of the way of blame.

Unfortunately for him, when he arrived, it was to see Hermione Granger, surrounded by dead or dying dark wizards and witches, fire a body-bind at Snape, causing him to drop to the ground.

Suddenly the Aurors charged forward, intending to get an accurate assessment of the situation and to see if any of the dying Death Eaters could be questioned.

Hermione meanwhile, approached Snape and dragged him upper-body upright and aimed her wand at Snape's face.

"No, don't." demanded Dumbledore, knowing that she was about to expose Snape.

But it was too late: a quick vanishing charm removed Snape's mask and the face of the Head of Slytherin House was clear for all to see.

Hermione looked up and sent a glare at Dumbledore before disappearing away from the scene, taking Snape's bound body with her.

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Luna, Padma and Sally-Anne arrived outside the cottage on the northern outskirts of the village of Littleton in in Somerset and entered just as Harry Potter was plating up dinner. The usually small dinner table had been enlarged, with more seats around it, in which



the witches quickly sat. Moments later they were served a sumptuous chicken dinner.

"Merlin's saggy left testicle, the guy can cook too." muttered Sally-Anne to Padma, who grinned before asking "Expecting more company Harry?" as she nodded to the fifth seat and plate of food on the table.

Harry grinned "Yeah, she'll be along any minute."

Suddenly they heard a bang as the front door was thrown open.

"Harry!" a frantic voice called out.

Harry left the kitchen and charged into the front room to take in the sight of a woman with bushy brown hair, collapsed in his doorway, sobbing hysterically and covered in blood.

"Hermione!" he cried, running to her as Luna, Padma and Sally-Anne ran into the room.

Harry wrapped his arms around Hermione and pulled her to him. This action allowed him to see the body-bound form that had been lying beneath her.

"Snape."

A/N: And there we go. Sorry for the long Author's Note at the beginning, but several people moaned about me not informing them that the pairing might be different at the start of the story, but I did! Anyway, we had some of everything in this chapter: plot, a bit of action, and, finally, confirmation that Harry and Hermione do know each other. So there you go: what do you think?

## Chapter 11: Recovery

"The blood is not hers." said Luna, after running some diagnostic spells over Hermione.

Harry nodded "Alright, Luna, I think you know what to do with our unexpected guest. I'm going to get Hermione to the bed."

Hermione clung to Harry's shirt as he lifted her up and carried her out of the room.

Luna cast a few cauterising charms at Snape to stop his bleeding and then turned to Padma and Sally-Anne "Come on. I know just where to stick him." she said.

With another flick of her wand she cast "Mobilicorpus", causing Snape's bound body to rise up into the air. Luna then led the way into the garden at the back of the house. Through the stables, past the pigsty, the cows, the pond and the vegetable plot and around the back of the greenhouses they went, to where a small trap door sat.

Padma drew her wand and gave it a flick, which opened the trap door. Luna then unceremoniously allowed Snape's body to drop through the opening and down deep into the ground. After hearing the body reach the bottom with a satisfactory thud, Padma closed the trap door and followed Luna and Sally-Anne back into the house.

In the kitchen, Luna cast warming charms on their dinners, conjured covers to go over the tops of the plates, and then led the way to the bedroom

"Dobby, Winky." Harry called out after he placed Hermione on his bed.

The two House Elves appeared with simultaneous pops.

"Master Harry is calling Dobby and Winky?" asked Dobby, before he noticed the apparent situation "What's wrong with Mistress Grangy?" he cried, tugging on his long pointy ears in worry whilst Winky looked horrified.

"I don't know yet." replied Harry "Look, could you two fetch us some medical supplies? Particularly a calming draught?"

"At once Harry sir." squeaked Winky as she and Dobby gave a bow and then promptly vanished.

Many miles away, Daphne Greengrass, a well-known potions mistress was working on a standard blood-replenishing potion when her work was interrupted by two pops caused by two house elves appearing in her workroom.

"Mistress Greeny-Grass," said Dobby the House Elf, turning to address her "Master Harry is requiring healthy-making potions."

Daphne nodded "Alright. You know where they are. Who's hurt?"

"Mistress Grangy." replied Winky, sadly.

That surprised Daphne; Hermione Granger was not someone that one could ambush easily.

"Is she ok?"

"Dobby thinks Master Harry thinks so." replied Dobby. Fortunately for Daphne, she had long ago learnt to understand House Elf speak.

"Alright, well take what you need, and tell Harry that I'll be over in the morning for more." said Daphne, before going back to her work.

Dobby and Winky took what they needed, and then went back to Harry's cottage.

When they arrived, they found Hermione propped up on some pillows, which Harry sitting next to her, an arm around her as he whispered comforting words to the shocked witch. Alongside them, Sally-Anne was casting cleaning charms to get rid of the last of the blood, and Luna and Padma were running more diagnostic charms.

"Mistress Greeny-Grass says she'll be bringing more tomorrow." said Dobby as he handed Harry a calming draught, who thanked Dobby before feeding it to Hermione. From then it only took a few minutes to calm her down.

"Hermione?" asked Harry in a soft voice "Hermione, can you tell me exactly what happened?"

Hermione took a few deep, calming breaths before answering.

"I was on my way to the Three Broomsticks when they ambushed me outside Tomes and Scrolls. There were nine of them; seven Death Eaters and a Werewolf. I killed two and incapacitated a third with a fire whip. I blew another's head apart, and tore holes into two others. I drove an aspen stake into one of the Werewolves, and killed the other with a silver knife. Then the leader attacked."

"Snape." growled Harry, earning a nod from Hermione.

After a few moments she said "I think Dumbledore knew."

Silence filled the air in the room as each of its occupants took in that piece of information. The possibility was there, that much they all knew.

"Hermione, I want to see a memory of this." said Harry.

Hermione nodded her consent.

"Winky, could you fetch-" the little House Elf popped away before he could finish his request, and returned moments later with a pensieve.

With a little cooperation from Hermione, Harry was able to extract the memory from her mind and place it within the pensieve before entering it.

As Harry was busy watching the memory, a ginger cat trotted into the room and jumped up onto the bed.

Hermione smiled and scratched the cat behind his ears "Hello Crookshanks,"

Technically this cat was Crookshanks III, but that was too much of a mouthful. He was the grandson of the half-cat/half-kneazle that Hermione had obtained just before her third year of education and, like his father and grandfather before him, Crookshanks III was a very loyal, and very smart cat; the perfect familiar for the loyal and smart Hermione Granger.

A few moments later, Harry left the pensieve, and he had a grave look on his face.

"Yeah, the bastard knew alright." he growled. He rubbed his forehead wearily before turning to two of the witches in the room.

"Padma, Sally-Anne, are we alright to take a rain-check on our meeting?"

"Of course." replied Padma.

"Absolutely." confirmed Sally-Anne "Listen, I'm sure that you three will want to spend a little time together, so we'll head off."

As Luna saw the two witches out, Harry got back on the bed and wrapped Hermione up in his arms.

"I was so scared." said Hermione, in a small, frightened voice.

"I know." said Harry "But you were wonderful, and I couldn't be more proud of you."

"But I killed eight people."

"And if you hadn't killed them?"

After a few moments, Hermione nodded in acceptance.

"Hey, do you fancy some dinner?" Harry asked after a few more quiet moments "I cooked."

Hermione actually managed a smile at that "You're the best cook."

"Is that a yes to dinner then?"

Hermione nodded "Ok,"

Both stood and headed into the kitchen. Luna joined them as Crookshanks III stretched out on the now vacated pillows of the bed.

"I gave Padma and Sally-Anne their dinners to take with them." said Luna, taking her seat as Harry and Hermione took theirs.

Harry nodded in reply and they settled in to eat their dinner.

After a good few minutes of silence, Hermione spoke again "I don't think I could go back to Hogwarts now."

"Hey," said Harry, reaching out to take hold of her hand "No one is going to ask you to do that. I think that Dumbledore won't argue against that, knowing what he knows. And anyway, that means you can be here more."

"Here with us." added Luna, reaching out and taking Hermione's other hand into her own.

Hermione smiled at the gesture, and then the three continued their meal in silence.

Once the food was finished, Hermione announced that she was tired. Harry and Luna decided that it was best to stay with her, and so all three of them headed off to the bedroom, leaving Dobby and Winky to clear up the mess.

After taking another calming draught and a dreamless sleep potion, it was not long before Hermione was sound asleep. Luna joined her soon after, but it took Harry a while to fall asleep. Instead he just laid there, enjoying having Hermione cuddled up to one side of him, and Luna cuddled up against his other side. Crookshanks III was curled up in the top corner of the bed, behind Hermione's head, which was resting on Harry's right shoulder.

As far as Harry Potter was concerned, with one girlfriend on either side of him, all was right with the world... for now.

"I told you not to trust the greasy-haired bastard" Mad-Eye Moody was saying.

"You've subjected years' worth of students to that man, always overriding us when complaints were raised-" Minerva McGonagall was saying.

"No amount of insisting on your part is going to save that bastard this time, Albus..." Amelia Bones was saying.

"...told you he was never on our side, but would you listen...?" Sirius Black was saying.

"I'll personally skin him alive if and when I can get my hands on him..." Rufus Scrimgeour was saying.

"...never repented and you were a fool to believe it..." James Potter was saying.

"If I find out you knew anything about this in advance, I'll tear that beard out by its roots and shove it so far up your arse..." Filius Flitwick was saying.

"You're a fool, Dumbledore, nothing but a senile old fool" Cornelius Fudge was saying.

"... no telling how many Order missions were compromised by him..." Remus Lupin was saying.

"Better search the rest of the school's staff and Order for Dark Marks..." Kingsley Shacklebolt was saying.

"...should've retired years ago..." Lily Potter was saying.

"...board of Governors will be meeting to discuss your future at the school..." Augusta Longbottom was saying.

Nothing was right with Albus Dumbledore's world. Getting rid of the jumped up mudblood that was Hermione Granger should have provided two outcomes: one, securing the position of Snape the spy amongst Voldemort's ranks for a few more months, and two, remind the divided light side of what was important and reunite them under one banner.

Well that last one was certainly achieved, though currently they were united under the 'blame Albus Dumbledore for the state of things' banner.

The mudblood had proved to be unexpectedly powerful; she had handled her attackers with surprising ease, dealing out deadly blows

that instantly killed half the group, and meant that the other half would die before aid could be administered.

And on top of that: Snape was now missing, and known to have been involved in the attack. After her brutal display of self-defence, Dumbledore was left wondering just what kind of torture Snape was currently enduring at the hands of Hermione Granger.

Of course, Dumbledore currently could not focus too much on Snape's fate, as it seemed that everyone was out for Albus' blood. He could see their point, after all he had personally vouched for Snape for years, and now the man was a known participant in the plot to kill Hermione Granger, one of Wizarding Britain's most prominent Muggle-Born witches, second only to the famous Lily Potter herself.

The problem was that these people did not know all the facts. They did not know that the murder of Hermione Granger was supposed to keep Snape safe in his position. Of course, had these people known that, they would be even angrier at Dumbledore. They simply did not see the Greater Good as Dumbledore saw it. They would never understand why Dumbledore would sacrifice Granger for Snape.

But none of his reasoning mattered now, because the assassination attempt had failed, costing six people and two werewolves their lives, and costing Dumbledore his spy, and possibly a lot more besides.

In his eagerness to make a martyr of Hermione Granger, Dumbledore had overlooked her apparent popularity. In fact he had never noticed her popularity really; he knew she was liked by the Muggle-born students, but beyond that he was unaware of just how well-known the first generation witch was. It was a sign of just how out of touch with the rest of the world he really was.

Few in the room could really image the scale of the impact of this event when it made the news the following morning: all that could be said for certain was Albus Dumbledore would be lucky to survive the fallout.

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Early the following morning, Potions Mistress Daphne Greengrass made good on her promise and arrived at Harry Potter's cottage with a few more potions to help Hermione recover from her ordeal; though spending the night in Harry's arms seemed to have helped a lot with that already. Daphne was not alone when she arrived, however.

Accompanying her was her sister: Astoria Malfoy, née Greengrass. Harry raised an eyebrow at her arrival.

"What brings you here, Lady Malfoy?"

Astoria sank into a respectful bow "My Lord, I bring news. I am with child."

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Feeling like he had been run over by a rampaging herd of Hippogriffs, Severus Snape woke up and took in his surroundings. He seemed to be in a hole of some kind, probably below ground. Wondering just how he was going to escape from this, he failed to notice the body of Ryan Spinks until he accidentally placed his hand on it. Quickly he moved away from the body and sank down to the ground as far away from the body as he could get.

Remembering the last time he saw Ryan Spinks, he realised where he might be.

Harry Potter.

So Granger had known of him. An interesting development. But now how to report this to Dumbledore? Well, Snape would have to get out of here first; whatever and wherever here actually was.

A/N: And I'll leave it there. Sorry for the delay in getting this up, but there have been things preventing me from finishing this chapter: you don't care what they are, so I won't bore you with them. Anyway, hopefully this chapter makes up for the delay, what with confirmation of who Hermione's master from chapter five is, the arrival of Crookshanks (well, his grandson, anyway), the beginning of tough times for Dumbledore, the arrival of Dobby and Winky on the scene, and, at long last, the long-awaited appearances James, Lily, Sirius,

Remus, Kingsley and Mad-Eye Moody. I know that they were barely cameos, but that's just the way the chapter came together.

Also finally, confirmation that Harry and Hermione are in a relationship together. Together with Luan that is. I know I pissed off some people when I introduced Luna as Harry's girlfriend before, but that's just the way the story went. They are together now, so stop bugging me about it!

Oh, any by the way, any of you who are confused about whom Hermione's master is, and why Astoria comes to Harry's home, read chapter five again. I think that nearly everyone missed something. Well, everyone who reviewed did, anyway.

See you next time!

## Chapter 12: Fallout

### The Daily Prophet

#### Shock Assassination Attempt

by Louis Munroe.

The Wizarding World was left in shock last night when Death Eaters made an attempt to assassinate well known Hogwarts muggle studies teacher Hermione Granger as she walked through the streets of Hogsmeade. Fortunately the Death Eaters had underestimated their opponent, for Madam Granger left the scene unhurt, whilst the Death Eaters bled out. Eyewitnesses claim that Madam Granger was initially attacked by eight people; six Death Eaters and two Werewolves, who surrounded her after hiding behind the shop Tomes and Scrolls. Through the combined use of a fire-whip, cutting and exploding spells, a wooden stake and a conjured silver knife, Madam Granger was able to permanently dispatch all eight of her attackers before a final Death Eater put in an appearance. With superior duelling skills, Madam Granger was able to throw down this foe as well before revealing his face to the Aurors who had arrived on the scene only moments before. To the shock of many, this man was revealed to be Severus Snape; former Potions Master and current Professor of Defence Against the Dark Arts at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. Madam Granger apparated away from the scene moments after the arrival of three other members of Hogwarts' staff: Minerva McGonagall, Deputy Head, Head of Gryffindor and Professor of Transfiguration, Filius Flitwick, Head of Ravenclaw and Professor of Charms, and Albus Dumbledore himself, the Headmaster. When Madam Granger left she took the still alive body of Severus Snape with her. Her current whereabouts are unknown.

Confirmed as dead are as follows:

Death Eater Jeremy Gibbon: head cut off by fire whip.

Death Eater Darren Bole: head cut off by fire whip.

Death Eater Carl Warrington: head blown apart by blasting hex.

Death Eater Godfrey Goyle: neck cut open by fire whip.

Death Eater Alecko Carrow: stomach and other internal organs destroyed by piercing hex.

Death Eater Cyrus Derrick: arm removed and chest cut open by cutting curse.

Werewolf Andrew Kessler: Wooden stake in the side, cutting curse to the neck.

Werewolf Russell McDermott: cutting curse to the chest silver dagger through the skull.

The state of injury of one Severus Snape is currently unknown.

Aurors on the scene have been unable to comment.

News of this attack has been met with hostility; Madam Granger has become one of the most prominent muggle-born witches in history, her line of work allowing her to encourage fellow muggle-borns to better themselves. As such many pro-muggle-born groups are urging the Ministry to crack down even harder on Death Eaters and their fellow elitists before such attacks can happen again. Their concerns seem to have been listened to, for last night every member of the Ministry's Department of Magical Law Enforcement were called in to conduct raids on the homes of all those who were killed in the attack. As a result, thirteen witches and wizards bearing the Dark Mark were rounded up and arrested, with a further nineteen brought in for questioning. However, high ranking Death Eater Amicus Carrow, brother of Alecko, was not amongst them.

Perhaps feeling the most heat from this latest attack is Albus Dumbledore, who has employed Severus Snape for more than thirty years and has personally vouched for him in the past when doubts about his true allegiance have been brought up. In emergency sessions to be held today the Hogwarts School Governors, the Wizengamot and the International Confederation of Wizards will discuss Albus Dumbledore's continued involvement with each organisation.

Those meetings had, in fact, already happened by the time people were getting their copies of the Daily Prophet, and the votes for each

one had been nearly unanimous: kick Dumbledore out. Even the Dumbledore loyalists were turning against him.

The new Supreme Mugwump for the International Confederation of Wizards was some guy known as Estevez, the new Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot was Tiberius Ogden, and the new head teacher for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry was Minerva McGonagall, at least in the interim, anyway.

And it was Minerva McGonagall who had to stop reading her copy of the Daily Prophet to accept an owl-delivered letter addressed to The Head Teacher.

It was from Madam Granger, stating that she was resigning from her post as teacher for muggle studies.

To be honest, McGonagall was not a bit surprised. It was a blow most definitely, but it was not a surprise. Dumbledore had really let the school down on this, as well as the world. McGonagall knew for certain that Aurora Sinistra and Septima Vector had both been planning on resigning had Dumbledore remained, though Bathsheba Babbling had argued against that, stating that the more teaching posts there were available, the higher the chances there were of Dumbledore adding another supposedly repentant Death Eater to the staff.

As much as McGonagall hated to admit it; firing Albus was the only decision that the board of governors could take. Earlier this morning the students of Hogwarts had found out about the attack, and it was only the news that neither Dumbledore nor Snape would be returning to Hogwarts that prevented the all the muggle born students, and a good number of others, banding together and forming a lynch mob. Sensing a change in the air, and without Snape to protect them, the Slytherin Students had exhibited their supposed sense of cunning by doing something very sensible; they had barricaded themselves inside their common room, refusing to come out. This coupled with the outright indignation and outrage being expressed by the majority of the other students was what had caused McGonagall to cancel classes for the day; no one would concentrate.

At any rate, none of the students would be able to have attended two of their classes anyway, not now that the teachers for Muggle

Studies and Defence Against the Dark Arts were gone. It was going to give her headache trying to fill those posts, though fortunately a solution to a part of the problem seemed to present itself when an ex-student stopped by to see how her former Professor was doing in her new capacity.

It's certainly a possibility. McGonagall thought to herself as she poured her old student-turned friend a cup of tea.

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Voldemort was currently doing the confusing, by being two things at once. He was very, very angry because what should have been a relatively easy assassination had cost him the lives of two werewolves and six Death Eaters, including two of his inner circle, and a seventh Death Eater, the leader, missing and likely spewing out plenty of precious information at that very moment. At the same time, Voldemort was very happy; the assassination attempt might have failed, but it had resulted in Dumbledore losing every seat of power that he had held for so long. For years Voldemort had tried to unseat Dumbledore, and now it had happened as a truly welcome side effect of a botched murder attempt.

Needless to say, Voldemort in this odd double-mood was very disconcerting, and so all of his Death Eaters opted to stay out of his way for as long as possible.

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Albus Dumbledore could only guess as to what the Daily Prophet was saying about him, for he could not actually read a copy, given how he was currently locked up in a Ministry holding cell awaiting further interrogation.

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Harry Potter had no idea what the Daily Prophet had said either, because although he did subscribe, it was not delivered to his cottage, and he had not gone to collect it yet. As Hermione was writing out a letter of resignation for Professor McGonagall, Harry

had taken Daphne Greengrass and Astoria Malfoy into the spare bedroom to discuss Astoria's news.

"Are you certain that you are pregnant?" asked Harry.

Astoria nodded "I used the highest calibre of pregnancy detection potion to confirm it, my Lord."

Harry nodded "Very well. The plan will continue as intended. Astoria, go and tell your husband, and persuade him to make a will by any means. Daphne, you know the potion to make. Brew it."

"At once my Lord." said Astoria with a bow.

Harry smiled "Astoria, you have done as asked. I believe we can let that whole 'my Lord' thing drop now don't you?"

She gave him a questioning look "My Lord?"

Harry gave a chuckle "Oh if only I had a sickle for every time I've confused my followers with that bit. Astoria, you only have to refer to me as Lord either around the new recruits, or when you are a new recruit yourself. You have proven yourself worthy, and so you can use my name, as I will now use yours."

Slightly stunned about the honour being awarded her, Astoria merely gaped at him before stammering "Th-thank you my Lor- er, Harry. Thank you Harry."

Daphne chuckled and wrapped an arm around her sister's shoulders "Come on you. Let's get you somewhere where you can lie down for a bit.

Harry's eyes danced with amusement as the pair left.

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The iron bar door to the cell opened noisily and Albus Dumbledore looked up to see three people enter: Amelia Bones, the head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Rufus Scrimgeour, the head Auror, and Kingsley Shacklebolt, one of the highest ranking Aurors.

"Well Albus, care to share?" asked Amelia.

Dumbledore fidgeted uncomfortably; the magic-binding shackles on his wrists were rather cold. Back in his office he had, at first rather hoped to be able to smooth all of this over with a few placating, genial words that actually meant nothing. When that didn't work, he had tried insisting that Snape had his trust, another trick that had always worked before. It had been the wrong thing to say this time, as this time they actually had evidence to back up their suspicions of the man.

It also seemed that proclaiming his continued trust of Snape was just what they needed to arrest him. He had tried to fight back, but somehow they had gotten the better of him. That probably had something to do with Fawkes the Phoenix refusing to help him in any way. Now with his magic bound, it really was time to face the music. In hindsight, the assassination of Madam Granger was something that had not been planned properly. She might have been a teacher on staff for quite a number of years, but the truth was that neither Dumbledore nor Snape had really taken the time to see just how powerful she really was. That had underestimated her on a catastrophic scale.

The best he could hope for now was getting himself off the hook.

Looking up, his eyes met Amelia's.

"I honestly though he had changed his ways.

The trap door above opened and three figures used levitation charms to allow themselves to float gently to the bottom.

"Talk." Harry Potter demanded of Severus Snape.

Snape scowled at him "I have nothing to say to you. To any of you."

"Oh dear," said Luna Lovegood "He's going to make this difficult."



"I think I might have a way to convince him." said Hermione Granger, using her wand to light up the area.

What Snape had thought was a small circular prison cell was actually just a small part of a larger room. The walls that Snape had thought he had felt were actually just very clever wards, solid and see-through. And Snape did not like what he saw.

"Did you never wonder what happened to Fluffy after that whole Philosopher's Stone fiasco?" asked Harry.

Snape's mouth was hanging open, his eyes wide with fear. Just beyond the ward barrier, and dominating the majority of the room, was a gigantic three-headed dog. A Cerberus.

"After his duty was performed," continued Harry "Hagrid released Fluffy here into the wilds of the Forbidden Forest, and it was there that I and Luna found him, some years ago now. Funny thing about a Cerberus is that they can easily live for up to two hundred years, perhaps as long as two hundred and fifty."

Fluffy, who up to this point had been lying down, got to his feet growling and drooling.

"Aw, he's hungry." observed Luna.

Harry took his wand and pointed it at the corpse of Ryan Spinks. A quick spell threw the body through the ward line, where it came to a stop at Fluffy's feet. The three monstrous heads of the dog wasted no time ripping the body to pieces.

Hermione looked back to Snape "Ready to talk now?"

It was then that Snape realised just how different Harry Potter was from his brother, and just how much he had underestimated Hermione Granger.

It was also in that moment that he lost all bladder control.

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The Board of Governors had had another emergency meeting to discuss it, McGonagall had talked it through with her fellow staff members at lunch, and now it was time to announce it to the students.

The noise in the Great Hall as the students spoke to each other over dinner died down as McGonagall stood.

"May I have your attention please?" seeing that she had it, she continued "Now as I am sure all of you are aware, Madam Granger was, last night, the victim of an assassination attempt. I received word from her this morning, assuring me that she is safe and well."

Many students broke out into cheers at this point.

"Unfortunately," McGonagall continued once the noise had again died down "Unfortunately Madam Granger feels that it would not be safe for her to return to public view at this time, and as such she has decided to resign from her post as Muggle Studies teacher."

The noise levels in the hall increased again, with many expressing their disappointment, whilst many a Slytherin looked relieved.

"This of course presented me with a problem" continued McGonagall "and one that I am happy to announce that I have solved. So if you would all please welcome the new teacher of Muggle Studies, Madam Lily Potter."

Every eye in the Great Hall turned as the huge double doors opened to admit one Lily Potter, dressed very smartly in robes befitting any Hogwarts Professor. There certainly was no sign of the fashion style they all usually associated with her from the photographs in the Daily Prophet and Witch Weekly.

She made her way along the passage between the Gryffindor and Ravenclaw tables and towards the head table with a sense of purpose. At the podium, Professor McGonagall stepped aside to allow Lily to address the students.

Looking a little nervous, Lily Potter stepped up to the podium to speak.

"Good evening, all of you. I understand how many of you were shocked to learn of last night's awful events; I was to. Madam Granger was a wonderful, hardworking individual who has made the Muggle Studies course here at Hogwarts unrecognisable compared to what it was when I was a student here. Hopefully she will be able to return to her post here soon, but in the meantime I promise you that I will strive to do my utmost to keep the standard of education into the Muggle World to the level that you have come to expect. I bid you all to take heed of what happened last night and remember, no matter what the bigots of our society might say, Muggleborns are just as good. Madam Granger knew that, and look where it got her; the respect of thousands, the intelligence to get a whole new generation thinking in ways unheard of in this world before, and the skills to fight off nine of the alleged Dark Lord's followers. She did not allow how the world viewed her to hold her back; instead she strove to be the best that she could be. If there is one witch in our society that you should all want to be like, it is her. Thank you."

It was scattered applause to which she sat down; the vast majority of students were trying to work out what she had said. From her seat in the centre of the head table, McGonagall could see more than a few of the girls who were more obsessed over their looks than their grades looking genuinely confused. The fashion columns in many a Wizzarding publication had held for years that Lily Potter was the sort of woman that all girls should strive to be like, and yet here was Lily Potter herself telling them not to be like her, but instead to be like Hermione Granger, a woman who never really bothered with copious amounts of make-up or pretty dresses, but instead was hard working, and devoted to her beliefs, devoted to making the world a better place.

There were many out there who already did their best to be like Hermione Granger, and maybe, just maybe, the arrival of Lily Potter at Hogwarts would make others follow that path as well.

Lily certainly intended to.

A/N: Right, that's it. I'm done with this chapter. Yes, I know that all this happening in twenty-four hours seems like a stretch, the Wizzarding world has never been one to respond quickly. However, you should remember that in this story the light side is at odd with each other over Arnold's death, and as such each leader has been waiting to pounce on another and knock out another opponent for

control of the light side. The bit with Fluffy was always intended to be there, and the bit with Lily arriving at Hogwarts to teach was something I came up with a while ago. As you have seen, Lily thinks very highly of Hermione, and that will be important in the future. Anyway, I won't bore you any longer with Author's Notes, and hopefully the next chapter will be out a little quicker than this one was. (Finger's crossed!)

Oh, one more thing to mention, I saw the film during my absense from this story. It is fantastic or what? One question though, am I right in saying that the lovely Shefali Chowdhury and her character Parvati Patil was completely absent? I noticed that she was missing from part 1, but I just thought that that might have been how the scene on the Hogwarts Express was shot, but I really cannot recall seeing her during the any of part 2. Afshan Azad who plays Padma was still in it though. I think it was nice to see that they kept characters like her around instead of continuously recasting them or dropping them completely (like Lee, Angelina, Susan, etc.)... Right, that's enough reminicing about the film, honestly it was brilliant and if you haven't seen it yet... what are you, cheap or something? GO SEE IT!

## Chapter 13: The Attack on Longbottom Manor.

Rodolphus Lestrangle entered the main chamber of Nott Manor, where Lord Voldemort himself sat on a high-backed throne.

Sweeping into a bow he spoke:

"My Lord, we have found them. We have found the location of Arnold Potter's friend."

Voldemort sat, watching his servant for a few moments, before giving an acknowledging nod of his head.

"Kill them."

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As Harry Potter was using intimidation tactics to get information from Severus Snape, a meeting of a less violent kind was taking place in the dining hall of Longbottom Manor, located on The Fylde, a coastal plain in Western Lancashire. The area was a peninsular, bordered by Morecambe Bay in the north, the Irish Sea to the west, the estuary of the River Ribble to the south and the barren grit stone fells, deep valleys and peat moorland of Bowland Fells to the east. The manor house itself was hidden behind strong wards, meaning that Muggles had no idea that it was there, and nor did the vast majority of Wizards.

This was probably just as well, for the vast collection of rare and magical plants growing on the grounds of Longbottom Manor would certainly have confused any muggle if they were able to see them. Neville Longbottom's collection of plants had certainly outgrown the two greenhouses he'd been given as a fifteenth birthday present by his Grandmother.

Inside the dining hall, a long table sat. It was somewhat typical of these manor houses to have such things. Around this table sat the second-best vigilante group in the Wizarding World (many would dispute that statement, but the one that Harry had going on was the best, and this one was second to it, with the Order under Moody's control third and the shambles led by Dumbledore was a far fourth out of four). At the head of the table sat the group's leader, one

Neville Frank Longbottom. On one side sat his wife, Hannah Sarah Longbottom, née Abbott, and on the other side sat the second in command Seamus Finnegan. Next to Seamus was his wife Lavender Sophia Finnegan, née Brown, and next to her sat Dean Jacob Thomas and his long-time girlfriend Parvati Patil, the twin sister of Padma. Next to Hannah sat her long-time friend Susan Amelia Bones, an Auror and the niece of the Head of the DMLE. Next to her was Cho Chang and next to her was her on-off boyfriend Michael Corner and next to him was Ernie Macmillan.

Although it was Neville who was officially recognised as this group's leader, each of these people were the ones who headed up the group, each one working together to help the others in training and presenting a united front against the ever growing darkness that threatened the world.

The group was not originally formed by Neville. Instead this group of forty-five were originally brought together by Arnold Potter during his fifth year, when he had decided that if everyone else had an army, then he should have one too. Of course at the time every member of this group had been caught up in the Arnold Potter legend and willingly joined. Things had gone ok until the middle of Arnold's seventh year, when Arnold received an invitation to officially join the Order of the Phoenix. Arnold had dropped them as though they smelt of manure and eagerly hurried off to train further under the prestigious Order. He had dragged Ron and Ginny Weasley with him, and Fred and George Weasley, along with Lee Jordan, had already been signed up. Once school had finished, Terry Boot had joined up as well, though he was the last to abandon them.

Once Arnold had left them, the group had looked like it was about to disband, until Neville stepped up to take the helm. At first most of the group had been a bit doubtful of his ability to lead them, but he quickly proved his worth after a meeting one evening when they all came across a group of around twenty Slytherins bullying a few first year Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws. Neville had directed his group's attack patterns and five minutes later the stunned and bound bullies were being dropped off outside the office of Professor Flitwick.

From then on the group had worked its hardest under Neville's guidance to become a powerful force in the war. They became known to the Order of the Phoenix, and even got a few of them, including their estranged former leader out of a few sticky spots.

Dumbledore had tried on several occasions to insist that it was best if Neville's group joined the Order officially, but Neville and the others decided that they liked being separate from their former headmaster. After leaving school and entering the real world, they all began to realise that Albus Dumbledore was not as great and powerful as he liked to pretend to be and in fact was actually a rather ineffective leader with delusions of grandeur, much like what Arnold Potter had eventually become.

Case in point was the breaking news headlines of today's Daily Prophet, which is what the group had gathered to discuss.

"It's appalling." Justin Finch-Fletchley was saying "Absolutely appalling. We and countless others have been subjected to Snape, all because that foolish old man insisted on his supposed reformation. We all know that the vast majority of the Slytherins that we attended school with went over to Tom Riddle's camp; and Snape was their Head of House. Merlin knows how many of them he could have been influencing over the years. Dare I say it, but some of them could have turned out half decent. Not all their parents served that monster, so the numbers cannot be blamed on them."

Several people, including some former Gryffindors voiced their agreement on that.

"But is there anything that we can do to help?" asked Romilda Vane.

"I can't see that there's anything we can do." said Seamus "According to the Prophet, Dumbledore's been booted out of the school and is currently being questioned by Susan's aunt. Granger took Snape with her when she left the scene, all others who attacked her are dead, and the Aurors have already rounded up their families. Best we can hope for is McGonagall puts someone sensible in charge of Slytherin to rein them in. There's nothing we can do for those who've already left Hogwarts; I mean, we don't exactly have the resources for a capture and re-educate program."

"True enough." said Neville "I think that the best we can do is try and contact Granger and offer her assistance with Snape. It hasn't been reported anywhere that she handed him over to the Ministry, and I think we could assist her in detaining and questioning him."

Hannah gave a dry chuckle "Oh, come on Nev. I hardly think she's going to have trouble with Snape, not after how she handled those other Death Eaters."

"You're right, of course." said Neville "But extending a hand of friendship couldn't hurt."

"You want to recruit her?" asked Dean.

"She'd be handy to have around." replied Neville "Like Hannah said, look at the way she handled those other Death Eaters, and those two Werewolves. Parvati, your sister was close with Granger at Hogwarts, wasn't she?"

"Yes, and from what I can gather, Hermione Granger is as likely to join a vigilante group as Padma is."

Neville cringed. They had approached Padma about joining them several times before, and got turned down flat each and every time.

"You know," said Lavender, looking thoughtful "now that I think of it, Padma and Hermione Granger were just two of a rather large group at Hogwarts. I'm fairly certain that I've seen most of them keeping in contact with each other."

"Yeah, Padma and several others like Sally-Anne Perks and Su Li work together somewhere. I think Luna Lovegood is her boss and she and Hermione were joined at the hip at Hogwarts, apart from when lessons separated them." said Padma.

"Do you think that it's possible that they've got their own vigilante group then?" asked Lavender "I mean if you think about it, most those who were in that group at school were muggle-born, like Hermione and Sally-Anne, or those who got bullied, like Padma, Luna and Su Li. They all banded together and formed their own group, befriending each other and standing up for each other; especially against the Slytherins like Malfoy and Parkinson. It's not that unreasonable to think that they continued that after school."

"I think we'd know if there was another group out there." said Ernie "Although I have to admit, it would explain a few things. Lucius Malfoy vanished without a trace, and turned up dead later. It could have been Riddle after Malfoy let him down, but I rather doubt he



would have carved the word Death Eater in the man's forehead before leaving him in the Ministry atrium."

Neville nodded "Well it is a possibility. No one ever claimed responsibility for that, and I doubt it was the Order's style. Alright, change of idea. Parvati scouts out Padma and finds out whether there's another vigilante group out there. If there is, we propose an alliance. Sound fair?"

Everyone at the table nodded.

"Good." said Neville "Parvati, you alright with that?"

"I think I can manage." replied Parvati with a grin.

Neville gave a nod and then asked the group "Anything else anyone wants to bring up?"

Before anyone could continue, the meeting was interrupted a noise that sounded like distant thunder filled the air.

"What the hell is that?" asked Oliver Wood.

Euan Abercrombie, being at the far end of the table and thus closest to the window, got up and took a look outside.

"We've got company." he announced.

Everyone rushed to get out of their seats and over to the three high windows that lines the dining room's south wall.

Up high in the sky black clouds had swirled and reshaped to form the image of a skull with a serpent for its tongue; the Dark Mark of Lord Voldemort.

From the mouth of the skull a good thirty black plumes of smoke came, shooting through the air and down towards the manor house below.

"They've found us." exclaimed Katie Bell "How have they found us?"

"I don't know." replied Neville "But that's not important right now. What is important is deciding if we make and stand and fight them or abandon the manor whilst we still can."

"We should fight." said Seamus.

"Yeah, this is our stronghold." agreed Lavender.

Neville looked around the rest of the group and saw nods from all of them. They were going to stand and fight.

Outside the plumes of smoke slammed forcefully into the wards, but they held strong, throwing the attacking Death Eaters back.

Neville raised his wand "Piertotum Locomotor! The manor is threatened. Man the entrances and the grounds, defend us. Do your duty to House Longbottom!"

Responding to the spell gargoyles in the shapes of lions, griffins, centaurs, eagles and harpies that had been attached to the manor house long ago came alive and broke free of the walls and marched to defend the home of the Longbottom family. Similarly across the grounds numerous statues of people, horses and other creatures came alive and moved to take up defensive positions as the human warriors inside did the same.

Unable to break through the wards physically, the Death Eaters landed on the outskirts of the property, just beyond the protective magical barriers where they turned and let loose a powerful barrage of bombardment spells which exploded and flickered like blue fireworks against the wards.

The defensive enchantments groaned and weakened under the strain.

Neville's group split into five factions; one lead by Neville and Hannah, one by Seamus and Lavender, one by Dean and Parvati, one by Susan and Ernie and one by Cho and Michael, and each pair was accompanied by seven others. They spread out, intending to protect the manor from several key points, with Seamus and Lavender leading their group to the eastern watchtower, and Dean and Parvati leading their group to the western watchtower. Cho and Michael stood guard with their group within the gatehouse, and

Neville, Hannah, Susan and Ernie leading their groups up to the turrets.

It was Rodolphus and Rabastan Lestrange that led the group of Death Eaters in this assault and it was they who fired the final powerful spells that finally caused the protective barriers around Longbottom Manor to fail.

"Move in!" barked Rodolphus, ordering the onslaught to begin.

Black plumes of smoke races across the manor grounds towards the house. Spells hurtled out of the watch towers and the Death Eaters were so closely grouped together that they were hit easily.

Not realising that the statues had been brought to life, several Death Eaters moved between two large fountains that were decorated with Mermaids and Mermen who were wielding longbows and tridents. A good dozen Death Eaters were brought down before they realised that they were under attack from the fountains and turned to take them out.

At the walls spells rained down upon the Death Eaters, who retaliated by blasting their way inside the stone walls. Jack Sloper was the first of the defenders to fall. His friend Andrew Kirke quickly followed before their attacker, Thorfinn Rowle was hurtled back through the hole he made in the wall by a spell from Katie Bell. Beside her Angelina Johnson and Alicia Spinnet mirrored her actions against Avery and Warrington. The fall killed Rowle and Warrington, but their bodies cushioned Avery's landing. He got to his feet, wand raised and a spell on his lips, but a statue of a Centaur reared up behind him, spear in hand, and drove it straight through the man's skull. Other Death Eaters avenged Avery by blowing up the Centaur statue, but other statues and gargoyles were ready to take its place.

Alexander Jugson led a group of five other Death Eaters around the side of the mansion, hoping to get around the defences and attack the defenders from behind. Unfortunately for them, this took them right into the range of some of the deadliest plants that Neville had in his collection, and they were quickly entangled in the deadly grip of Devil's Snare, Venomous Tentacula, and Snargaluff vines.

Quickly realising that Longbottom Manor was substantially more protected than originally anticipated, Rabastan pushed the tip of his wand against the Dark Mark tattoo on his arm to summon aid. Moments later no fewer than fifty plumes of smoke left the mouth of the skull still in the sky and they plummeted down towards the manor, shooting deadly spells as they went. Several of them hammered their way into the western watchtower, quickly overwhelming the majority of the group led by Dean and Parvati.

The structure of the watchtower was weakened considerably by the onslaught, and Dean quickly ordered a retreat, though only himself, Parvati and the two Creevey brothers escaped. Sienna Rivers, Kellah Mitchell and Amanda Hooch had been killed by the attacking Death Eaters, whilst Bem Jackson and his brother Rupert were unable to escape before an explosion courtesy of Death Eater Augustus Rookwood brought the tower down on top of the pair and the four Death Eaters they had been fighting.

As the tower collapsed, Rookwood apparated to a safer point, but the three Death Eaters who had been beside him were too busy firing spells at the statues to notice the broken rubble dropping towards them until it was too late.

Seeing the western watchtower fall, Neville sent a Patronus to Seamus ordering him to evacuate the eastern watchtower. Thankfully the whole group made it out just moments before that tower too was brought down.

The Lestrangle brothers fought their way through the statues and attacked the front door of the manor, which creaked and groaned under the onslaught.

Suddenly the air began to get very cold, and a swarm of at least a hundred Dementors swooped towards the manor. Cries of "Expecto Patronum!" rang out from the battlements and a good number of fully corporeal, silvery Patronuses raced towards the incoming swarm, led by Ernie's Boar, Seamus' Fox and Neville's Bear.

The Death Eaters took advantage of the distraction that the Dementors provided and pushed on with their attack. With a mighty crash the main doors of the manor exploded inwards in a shower of debris. Those charged with defending the gate quickly fought back

ferociously, though a flash of green light ended the life of Michael when Rabastan sent a killing curse his way.

In her fury Cho cast "Aqua Eructo!" to drive the Death Eaters from the entrance with a torrent of water. She followed this with a "Glacius!" which quickly froze the water to ice, trapping nine Death Eaters within, though Rabastan and his brother apparated out of harm's way before the water froze, taking Wilkes with them.

Lavender had just thrown down Amadeus Nott with a lethal cutting curse when the notorious Werewolf Fenrir Greyback leapt at her, forcing her to the ground and sinking his teeth into her arm. In his untransformed state he was not quite as strong as he liked to think, and Lavender was able to twist herself enough to jab her wand into his stomach. A scream of "Bombarda!" had the double effect of blowing Greyback's stomach out and sending him hurtling through the nearest window. Death Eater Kevin Travers saw this and raised his wand to deal the finishing blow to Lavender, but Rose Zeller attacked him from behind with a deadly spell that blew a hole in his back.

Another plume of smoke raced towards one of the holes in the wall as a Death Eater aimed to join in the chaos inside the manor. Leanne Simms saw him coming and, with a flick of her wand and a shout of "Duro!" she turned him to stone before he could enter the fray. His solidified body dropped to the ground, landing on the rather unlucky Peregrin Derrick, who had been trying to get a spell in against a rather aggressive lion statue. The stone Death Eater dropping on him allowed the lion to seek out other opponents and quickly pounced on Terrence Higgs and mauled him to death.

Considering their losses, Rabastan again pushed the tip of his wand into the dark mark on his arm, summoning more allies. They already had with them all the inner circle members that Voldemort was willing to commit to this mission, so aside from a handful of experienced lower ranking Death Eaters, the twenty that joined the battle now were mostly newer recruits. That was no matter; they were young, they were eager, they added a few more wands and if nothing else they would serve as cannon fodder, taking hits whilst allowing those with more experience to take down their enemies.

Neville watched in horror as more Death Eaters joined the battle. They couldn't last much longer. They needed help.

Elsewhere in the manor Parvati had come to the same conclusion. She, along with the other three survivors of her group had just now joined Cho's group in the entrance hall. Apparently Cho's group had been pushed back from the main doors. Out of the corner of her eye Parvati spotted Rose aiding a badly bleeding Lavender to a safer location whilst Seamus and Romilda provided cover. It looked like they were about to be overwhelmed, but Parvati was able to send a piercing hex into the head of one of the attacking Death Eaters. As Rookwood dropped to the ground, the five Death Eaters who had been accompanying him in his attempt to finish off Seamus and the others all turned to see where the spell had come from. This allowed Seamus and Romilda to take four of them down with cutters to the backs of their necks whilst Lavender managed to get her wand up and fire a reductor spell at the last one.

Seamus and Romilda joined the battle in the Entrance Hall as Parvati moved to assist Rose in getting Lavender to a safer spot.

Not too far away was the library, where they found several House Elves attending to the other wounded who had made it here: Alicia had a nasty looking gash across her right shoulder, Kevin Entwhistle and Anthony Goldstein were both receiving treatment for burns, Euan looked worryingly pale and was unconscious, Nigel Wesput had a bloody nose, could not see out of his right eye and had his right arm in a sling.

Parvati and Rose got Lavender over to one of the temporary small mattresses that the Elves had obtained from somewhere and set her down gently upon it. She was very pale and seemed a little delirious.

One of the House Elves finished up with Anthony and hurried over to assist. Seeing that Lavender was in good hands, Rose gave Parvati a nod and then headed back outside to re-join the fight, Anthony followed her.

Letting the House Elf do his work, Parvati moved to stand off to the side. She needed to communicate with someone in another part of the country.

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"Luna's late this morning." observed Sally-Anne.

"Hmm." murmured Padma in agreement "Well she's either busy helping Harry question Snape or, and this is what I'd be doing if I were her, she's currently naked with Harry screwing her brains out."

Sally-Anne gave a wistful sigh "Oh, if only he'd do that to me."

Padma laughed "Trust me, honey; you ain't the only woman who wishes she could be in that situation."

"Stupid noble Potter." grumbled Sally-Anne "If you're going to be polygamous, why stop at two?"

This just caused Padma to laugh harder.

That laughter came to an abrupt halt, however, when Padma heard an all too familiar voice in her head.

"Padma, can you hear me?" came Parvati's voice.

"Of course I can. What's the matter?"

"I'm at Longbottom Manor, and it's under attack. The Death Eaters breached the wards and they and a whole load of Dementors are attacking us. We're holding them off as best we can but we need help."

"Who's this we? Is it that little vigilante group that you belong to?"

"Yeah. Somehow they found us and now some of us are really injured or worse. Can you call on some Aurors?"

"I can get you better than that." answered Padma "Hold on, we'll be there soon."

With that she broke the connection and turned to Sally-Anne, who was looking at her strangely.

"Parvati's in trouble."

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Things were getting worse for the defenders of Longbottom Manor. The Death Eaters and Dementors were breaking in all over the place and corralling those still left standing in the entrance hall and library. A few of the statues were still standing and able to fight, but they were far and far between. They were easy pickings now.

In the library Lavender was back on her feet, though still a little unsteady. She now stood with Parvati, Nigel, Kevin and Alicia, who had all been healed. Euan was still out of it. They had been joined by Ernie, Susan, Justin, Megan Jones, Leanne, Vicky Frobisher, Demelza Robbins and Lavender's younger sister Jessica, all of whom had been forced back into this room. They were not under attack, but dared not leave the room. A House Elf had been able to inform them that a group of two-dozen Death Eaters and Dementors were standing just outside the door, waiting in ambush. If the Death Eaters came in, the defenders stood a chance; if the defenders left the room, they would be picked off easily.

In the Entrance Hall the rest of the remaining defenders were giving their attackers a rather hard time. They kept their eyes off of their dead comrades on the ground and instead focused on destroying as many of their foes as possible. It did not help that Rabastan had been able to summon yet more Death Eaters; an even dozen this time.

Suddenly there was a commotion outside, some Death Eaters shouting about new scum to fight. Neville spotted Rabastan pushing his way through the other Death Eaters to get a look, and in the library the small group of defenders hurried over to the window to get a look.

Up in the sky, next to the Dark Mark, the clouds had turned a strange purple colour, and now formed the shape of an owl, with its wings outstretched. From the tip of each feather on the ends of the wings plumes of purple mist flew out, quickly spiralling towards the ground, raining spells down on the Death Eaters.

Rabastan loudly ordered the Death Eaters to attack, but that was the last thing that he did. One of the swirls of purple mist landed behind him and faded to reveal none other than Hermione Granger who wasted no time in separating his head from his shoulders with her fire-whip. Several others fell victim to the whip as well as Padma



Patil, Sally-Anne Perks, Fay Dunbar and Libby Moon landed around Hermione and launched a barrage of spells upon the Death Eater ranks.

Realising that the real threat was now outside, the majority of Death Eaters moved to attack the reinforcements. This provided plenty of relief for the defenders, who quickly began to make short work of those left. The group waiting in ambush outside the library moved off as well, allowing those within to return to the fight.

Cho took the opportunity to send her Patronus out against the swarming Dementors, and her swan was quickly joined by a hare, a snake, a frog, a wolf, a sea lion and, perhaps most impressive looking of all, a large silvery doe. All of these came from the new arrivals, and the Dementors seemed to truly fear them, especially the doe. The reason for this quickly became clear when the doe charged a Dementor, impacted it and seemed almost to electrocute it. The Dementor gave a scream of agony before seeming to sag and then floating lifelessly towards the ground, its cloak and the body beneath breaking up into dust before it reached the ground. Many other Dementors joined it, each one giving a terrible scream of agony as the patronuses tore into them

The reinforcements seemed to number little more than twenty, but they more than made up for this, being able to fire off spell after spell without breaking a sweat. Cutting spells, piercing hexes, reductors, bone breakers, explosion spells and countless others battered the Death Eater ranks from all sides as the swarm of silvery patronuses wreaked havoc upon the Dementors above.

Neville, with Hannah, Dean and Seamus at his side fought his way through the Death Eaters, finally coming across Rodolphus and bringing him down with a reductor to the head. In that same moment another man made a sweeping gesture with his arm and thick black blade sailed from the tip of the wand in his hand and cut clean through the ten Death Eaters that separated him from the Lord of House Longbottom.

And so it was that in the middle of the battlefield, before the ruined manor house of Longbottom, Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom met face to face.

And in that moment, Neville Longbottom could only bring himself to say one thing:

"What the bloody hell...?"

A/N: There! That's it. This is a Chapter 13 I like. I knew I needed have a large battle sometime soon and last night, whilst not particularly sober, but not exactly sloshed either, this occurred to me: have Harry and Neville meet in battle. It's so much better than I had before, makes a bit more sense and actually gives Neville enough reason to trust Harry enough to at least hear him out, which is not something he had during the previous way chapter 13 was written, what with Harry just turning up slightly abruptly on his doorstep. Plus we get to see Neville's fighters in action, we get a little taste of Harry's power and, although most haven't been named yet, we can see that Harry's group consists of more than the around eight or so members I had mentioned before this chapter. Anyway, hope you enjoyed it and find it better than what was here before. Now that I am finally happy with this chapter, I can continue on with the story. Yay!

## Chapter 14: Clear Up

As the last of the Death Eaters were brought down, Neville Longbottom had his wand aimed between the eyes of Harry Potter.

"Who the hell are you?" he demanded.

"Someone who just put his life as well as those of his fighters on the line to save your skins." replied Harry calmly.

"Neville!" hissed Hannah, warningly as she grabbed his wand arm and forced him to lower it. Turning to Harry she said "You'll have to excuse my husband. He's a little rattled from the battle, and you look strikingly similar to an old friend of ours who recently perished."

Harry raised an eyebrow "Would I be right to assume that that old friend was Arnold Potter?"

"Yes, he was." replied Hannah.

Harry grinned roguishly at her "You'd be surprised how often I get that."

For some reason his grin did funny things to Hannah's insides and she had to wonder just why she felt like giggling like a schoolgirl.

"How come you look like him?" demanded Seamus, none too politely.

"It is purely through biological coincidence, I can assure you." replied Harry, somewhat mysteriously "Look, who I am is not important to you right now. The battle is won, and now a clean-up needs to take place. I shall leave some of my group with you under Padma's instructions she'll have them assist you in clearing up. Then you need to contact the DMLE and have them come out here to note the dead Death Eaters. During their time here, I expect three things from you: first, say nothing of who I am. As far as the authorities are concerned I don't exist and I want to keep it that way. Second, you will tell the DMLE that those I leave here are just friends of yours who answered your call for aid, nothing more. And finally you will say nothing of what happened to the Dementors. As far as the Ministry will be concerned you drove them off with Patronus charms. Do you understand me?"

"And what's in it for us if we do as you ask?" demanded Dean.

"Well for one I won't have to obliviate our arrival from your minds. Perhaps more importantly, if you do as I ask, I might be willing to extend a hand of friendship."

"You mean form an alliance?" asked Neville, unable to believe what was being proposed, given how his group had been discussing such a thing before the attack.

"If you wish to word it that way, then yes." replied Harry.

Neville stood watching Harry carefully for a few moments, before giving a nod "Alright. We'll play along. And then we'll hear what you really have to offer."

Harry extended a hand. Neville reached out and grasped it in a firm grip. They shook once before Harry broke the hold and drew his wand. He held the tip to his throat and called out loudly "Undesirables! I take my leave. Hermione and Luna, you're with me. The rest of you I leave in Padma's care. Do as she says. I will return later."

With simultaneous pops Harry Potter, Hermione Granger and Luna Lovegood vanished into thin air.

Padma's voice broke the silence "Alright, you lot. Let's get this place cleared up."

Instantly those belonging to the group that Harry had called the Undesirables set about clearing up; starting with the repairing the statues and gargoyles as well as quickly removing all traces of the dust the Dementors had become when hit with the special patronuses.

This snapped Neville back to reality and turned to address his group "Okay, guys. Let's get the injured healed and gather the dead. Our dead can go in the drawing room. Heap the Death Eaters outside."

Quickly he made his way over to Susan "Contact your aunt, get her to send a couple of Aurors this way to sort out the bodies of the Death Eaters."

Addressing them all as a whole he said aloud "The Aurors will be here soon. No one is to say anything of the demise of the Dementors or the Arnold Potter lookalike. And if asked, our new friends are just that: friends who came to our aid, is that clear?"

Receiving nods all around, he let them get to it.

Amelia Bones had been in a foul mood all morning. That old fool Dumbledore was really trying her patience; half the crap he came out with might as well have been spoken in double-dutch, gobbledygook or mermish for all the sense it made and it was driving Amelia around the twist.

As such the chance to talk to her niece Susan over the floo connection during her lunch break looked to be some much welcome relief. Or at least it did until Amelia realised the severity of the situation behind Susan making the call.

Shocked at the news that Death Eaters had carried out an attack on Longbottom Manor, Amelia wasted no time in sending a patronus off to Augusta, who was filling out paperwork in her office, and then rushing through the Auror department grabbing Scrimgeour, Kingsley, Dawlish, Tonks, Proudfoot, Savage, Williamson, Robards and just about anyone else she could get her hands on.

Not five minutes after Susan made the call did the Aurors arrive on the scene. Most of them immediately took a battle stance, but quickly realised that it was not needed. This was a clean-up job. People were already repairing the walls and windows whilst others were dragging the lifeless bodies of black robed figures across the grounds and dumping them in one large heap.

A pop behind them signalled the arrival of another person.

"NO!"

The impact of this word was made all the more gut wrenching because no one had ever heard the normally stoic matriarch of the Longbottom family sound so distraught.

Amelia immediately went over to her long-time friend and put an arm around her "It's over, Augusta, the battle is over. They're clearing up

now. And Susan has already told me that both Neville and Hannah are fine."

Augusta nodded shakily before making her way up across the grounds towards the house. Amelia nodded to her Aurors who immediately fanned out to assist where they could.

In the library Daphne Greengrass was examining the bite wound on Lavender Brown's arm. After a few moments of careful concentration she called out "Winky!"

With a pop the female house elf appeared "Yes Mistress Greeny-Grassy?"

"Winky, please go to my stores. I need Wolfsbane potion, essence of Dittany, essence of Murtlap, a blood replenisher and a wound cleaner." replied Daphne.

With a bow, Winky popped away.

Once Winky was gone, Daphne noticed Lavender eying her wound with no small amount of trepidation.

"Don't worry." said Daphne "The attack didn't happen on a full moon, so you won't be turning into a Werewolf any time soon."

Lavender shook her head "No it's not that. The wound is just so big... will it leave a scar."

"Yes and a big one at that." Daphne answered bluntly. Lavender cringed. Seeing this Daphne rolled up the sleeve on her right arm, revealing a very nasty looking scar that ran in a slight curve on her arm. It was mirrored on the underside of her arm too.

"Where'd you get that?" asked Lavender, fearfully.

"You know Voldemort's giant snake that follows him around?" asked Daphne. Eyes wide, Lavender nodded in response as Winky reappeared with the requested potions. Daphne began to apply the wound cleaning potion to Lavender's wound.

"My parents were Death Eaters" she explained "Fat lot of good it did them; they went on a raid in a Muggle shopping centre, looking to

get their jollies torturing the shoppers. The Aurors turned up and fought them. Both of them were torn apart by the Aurors' spells, so much the better for everyone. Of course Voldemort came looking for me to take their place, but by that time I was already fully in with this lot." she gestured to others around the room who had arrived to aid in the battle "Barely got out of there alive, and wouldn't have done if not for a portkey that took me back to headquarters. Of course, my escape happened after that blasted snake decided to see what I taste like. I didn't get to kill the bloody thing, more's the pity, but I did manage to return the favour and land it with a massive scar too."

By now she had added both the Wolfsbane and a few drops of blood-replenisher to Lavender's wound without her noticing and was now carefully adding a mixture of dittany and Murtlap essence to help the wound heal over.

"My point is," continued Daphne "never be ashamed of a scar; particularly one received in combat, okay?"

Lavender could not find the appropriate words, and so just nodded her head in thanks.

Amelia finally found her niece as she comforted Cho Chang over the death of Michael Corner.

Upon seeing her aunt approach, Susan separated herself from Cho and walked over to greet her.

"What can you tell me?" asked Amelia.

"More than a hundred Death Eaters and at least a hundred Dementors attacked." replied Susan "As far as I can tell they were led by Rodolphus and Rabastan Lestrage. Rookwood was here too, and Fenrir Greyback. All four of them are dead, and I don't think any other Death Eater made it out alive, but I cannot be sure. The Dementors were driven off."

Amelia nodded as she cast an eye over those helping to clear up.

"I can see some people here who I do not remember being a part of this group of yours." she observed.

Susan nodded "They're not. Parvati Patil has a mind link with her twin Padma. When we came under attack, Parvati contacted Padma about getting help. I think she meant get the Aurors, but instead Padma rounded up as many friends as she could at such short notice."

"There's quite a few of them." said Amelia.

"Padma works with a fair few of them." answered Susan "And she was at work when Padma called her."

Amelia nodded "Well, I think I'll be having a word with Padma Patil now." she reached out and pulled her niece into a hug "I'm so glad you're safe."

Susan smiled and returned the hug, knowing how worried her only remaining family member had been.

Seamus and Dean found Neville and Hannah in the remains of the dining hall.

"Who did we lose in the end?" asked Seamus.

Neville gave a heavy sigh and sat down on one of the few remaining chairs "Still counting."

Seamus and Dean hung their heads as Hannah moved to stand behind her husband and placed her hands on his shoulders.

The silence that they had fallen into was broken when Augusta Longbottom, Neville's grandmother, came bustling into the room and grabbed both Neville and Hannah into a fierce hug.

Padma was just helping Lisa chuck the body of a Death Eater onto the heap when she heard someone calling her name.

She turned around and saw Susan's aunt coming towards her.

"Good afternoon, Miss Patil." began Amelia "I'm Amelia Bones; I'm the Head of the DMLE. I'd just like to ask you a few questions about your involvement in all of this?"

Padma shrugged "Sure, what do you want to know?"



"I've already spoken to Susan, who claims that you and your twin sister Parvati share a mind connection of sorts. It's my understanding that Parvati used this to contact you in order to summon help, is that right."

"Yes, that's correct."

"Could you tell me how you rounded all of these people up?"

"Well I work with a fair few of them; Sally-Anne for example. When I told them what happened they were more than happy to help. Each of them called a few of their own friends and we all came here."

"And why did you not contact the Aurors?"

"I assumed that the Aurors had been made aware of the situation already, given how your niece was here fighting. I thought that it was now the standard for Aurors to have medallions that can be used to summon aid in times of crisis, and I assumed that Susan used hers."

"Yes, well unfortunately it is no longer required of Aurors to have their medallions whilst off duty. Leads to too many hazardous situations."

"And yet had Susan had it on her, the Aurors could have been here to help."

Amelia did not like Padma's tone as she said that, but said nothing of it.

"So you all came to join the battle? For no reason at all?"

"No reason at all?" exclaimed Padma "My sister is a part of the group that gathers here. That was more than enough for me to come help. The rest came because it was the right thing to do."

Amelia eyed Padma carefully for a few moments, before giving a nod of her head "Thank you, Miss Patil. You've been very helpful."

Padma gave a smile but said nothing as Amelia turned away.

In a small but cosy room furnished with a sofa and armchair facing a fireplace and with a bookcase in the corner, a House Elf appeared with a pop.

Hearing the sound of his arrival, a woman entered the room "What's happened Pokey?" she asked.

The Elf bowed low "Mistress, I bring word from Master Harry. He says he believes he is about to gain a rather large number of human allies."

"How so?"

"The Undesirables provided them aid in battle against an army of Death Eaters and Dementors." explained the Elf.

The woman frowned "And just who are the people they helped?"

The Elf had a smirk on his face as he replied "Neville Longbottom and his friends."

To say the woman was surprised by that was an understatement.

"Thank-you Pokey. You have done very well to bring me this news. Perhaps it is time I paid Harry a visit."

Pokey the House Elf bowed low again "If Mistress would be willing; Pokey would be happy to arrange with Master Harry for a time the two of you could meet."

The woman nodded "Yes, thank you Pokey."

With another bow, the House Elf disappeared.

Several hours after he left Longbottom Manor, Harry Potter was returning. Padma had sent a patronus message saying that the Aurors had left, and Harry wasted no time in heading out for a meeting with Neville Longbottom and his allies.

Naturally Hermione and Luna were by his side.

Neville and his group sat at one end of the table, whilst Harry and his group sat at the other. Most of both groups had dispersed, so

now only a few of each remained: Harry, Hermione, Luna, Padma, Sally-Anne and Daphne sat at one end; Neville, Hannah, Seamus, Dean, Parvati, Lavender, Cho, Susan and Ernie at the other.

"Right, what's this about an alliance?" asked Neville, getting straight to the point.

"It's quite simple," replied Harry "Both my group and yours fight for the same reasons; to get rid of Voldemort and the darkness that threatens to take over our world. I'm proposing that we join together and present a united front."

"If you're fighting for the common good then why all the secrecy?" asked Seamus.

Harry leaned back in his seat and surveyed the other group for a moment before replying "I am Harry Potter; the twin brother of Arnold Potter. And whilst I will fight Voldemort, I will never allow myself to become like my brother."

"A hero, you mean?" asked Parvati.

"A moron." replied Harry "A poor, misguided fool with delusions of grandeur." He leaned forward in his seat "The puppet of Albus Dumbledore."

Silence reigned. Many in Neville's group certainly felt that that was what Arnold Potter had become, but none had ever said it aloud.

"The puppet of Albus Dumbledore."

It was true, and horribly so. Often the press had claimed that Arnold Potter would one day become the new Albus Dumbledore. Many laughed it off, but for those who had actually known Arnold, the real Arnold, knew that that was exactly what Dumbledore had been trying to achieve. It was why the group had refused to join the Order of the Phoenix.

And if they were brutally honest, it was also why Arnold Potter was dead.

Finally it was Hannah who found her voice "But, if you are the brother of Arnold Potter, how come none of us can ever remember of hearing of you before now?"

"I believe that I can answer that best." said a woman entering the room.

Harry looked up and grinned at the red-haired new arrival.

"Hello Mother."

A/N: Sorry it's been so long and sorry it's so short. This one was a nightmare to get out and still feels a bit clumpy (if that makes sense). However, I needed to get it out of the way in order to get to chapter 15. At least you get some hints as to what chapter 15 will be about, and we have a little bit of backstory on Daphne at least. Anyway, look out for Chapter 15 on the way soon (hopefully ).

## Chapter 15: The Undesirables.

"Lily Potter?" exclaimed Hannah Abbott upon recognising the new arrival.

"The one and only." the woman replied with a smile.

"But..." stammered Hannah "But..."

"Oh, stop babbling girl. It's not an attractive trait." scolded Lily.

"I think what my wife is trying to ask is "what are you doing here?" said Neville.

"I'm here to explain to you all about The Undesirables." replied Lily.

"So you're in charge?" asked Seamus.

"I was." replied Lily "Though Harry pretty much runs everything now. Anyway; I believe that the main question you asked was "How could Arnold Potter have a brother that no one knows about?" Well the answer is simple; I didn't want them to know about him."

"So you just kept him hidden?" asked Dean.

"Not exactly, I just kept him out of the way. Harry was certainly never isolated. It's quite simple really: anyone who I wanted to know about him did, and those who I didn't, didn't."

"Why though?" asked Neville.

Lily chuckled "Why indeed." She took a seat next to Hermione "When Harry came into this world I was barely twenty years old, but I knew by then how the Wizarding world works, and when Voldemort was temporarily vanquished on Halloween night 1981, I knew exactly what the world would try and do to my son. I had known since the moment I heard the prophecy, three weeks before Harry's birth. I knew that James would do all he could to bask in as much of the reflected glory as possible. I knew that Dumbledore would train him up to be a pawn of war; a martyr for the cause of the so-called light side. I could see him being made to be the poster-boy for the Ministry of Magic, I could see him being torn apart by the press and I

could see him being adored by the public one minute and despised the next. I knew that I had to do something for him, and I did."

"Nobody remembers me for my academic achievements anymore, though three decades ago I was known for my affinity for Charms and Runes, and those are what served me best in order to achieve my goal."

"When Harry was born I really did give birth to two sons but one was still-born. I'll probably never know where the idea came from, but the moment I realised that my son's twin had died before even being born, I knew what I had to do. A few quick obliviations here and there and no one was any the wiser. When I got home I worked long and hard until I succeeded. Through charms and runes, Arnold Potter appeared alive again; ready to be the sacrifice."

"That's horrible." exclaimed Lavender.

"Is it?" asked Lily "Because as far as I can see, everyone benefitted: my husband got his little celebrity, Dumbledore got his puppet, the Ministry got their poster boy and most importantly Harry could be protected from all of them. It was, of course, Harry whom Voldemort attacked that fateful Halloween night, and the powerful wards I placed around the crib were more than enough to protect him, though it did give him that scar that Arnold was so famous for. I, of course, covered Harry's scar and added one to Arnold, fooling Dumbledore into proclaiming Arnold as the Boy-Who-Lived."

"Over the next few years I had to present the public front of Mother-Of-The-Boy-Who-Lived whilst in private I did all the research and development that I could into making sure that Arnold remained realistic. After all, runes and charms that made him seem to move, cry, breathe, eat and pee were one thing; but then he had to grow up; get bigger, learn to walk and talk and possess a personality. Harry was perfect for basing grow on, and with a lot of work I managed to give him my husband's attitude. By the time he was nine, everything controlling Arnold was able to regulate itself, and did not need altering again until he was seventeen, at which point I had to alter a couple of charms so that he stopped growing taller. For all intents and purposes, Arnold had become as close to an actual living wizard as it was possible for him to be; even possessing a mind and magical core... of sorts."

"And through all of that, Harry was safe. It didn't take long to get most people to forget about his existence, especially when he was kept away from the media."

"You did that all by yourself?" asked Lavender.

"I did have some help from a couple of my friends." replied Lily  
"None of the marauders, of course; too much of a risk with them, but my friends from school; Serena Ollivander, who was Luna here's mother, Hestia Jones and Sarah Willsher to name a few."

That got Hannah's attention "Sarah Willsher? That was my mother's name before she was married."

Lily nodded "And she was one of the ones to help me, not only in my research, but also with raising Harry when I couldn't be there due to the commitments of being a celebrity. There was a time when it was nearly impossible to separate you and Hestia's cousin Megan from Harry and Luna."

"Why do I not remember that?" asked Hannah.

"That would be your father's fault." replied Lily "You see I and your mother were together so much at Hogwarts that rumours started flying around. When you were seven your father had had enough of it, using his position as Head of House Abbott to force your mother to break all ties with me. Unfortunately that meant your friendship with Harry as well. It caused a bit of a scandal back then; the Mother-Of-The-Boy-Who-Lived allegedly having a lesbian affair with the wife of the Head of House Abbott. The story ultimately never went anywhere and everyone decided that it was not true when I revealed I was pregnant with twin daughters two weeks later. However it was enough for Hestia's aunt and uncle to decide that they no longer allow Hestia to bring Megan around for play dates with Harry. She won't remember a thing either."

Silence reigned for a few moments before it was broken by Neville  
"Mrs Potter, you do know that Hannah's mum died, don't you?"

Lily raised an eyebrow and sent a questioning look towards Hannah  
"You've never told him?"

Hannah shifted uncomfortably for a moment before returning to Neville "She didn't die. She just faked her death. I never understood how she managed to fool both the Aurors and the Healers who examined the fake body, but now I'm guessing that she had help." She looked towards Lily as she said this.

Lily gave a nod "She was desperate to get away from your father. She held out for your sake but by the time you went off for your sixth year at Hogwarts, she couldn't take it anymore; the physical abuse, the shouting, the alcohol..."

Hannah nodded "I know. She explained that much. And I'm guessing that the prostitutes never helped much."

Lily grimaced "Actually they did help. Sarah knew that so long as he was with them, he couldn't hurt her."

"What about the emotional upset of your husband sleeping with others?" asked Parvati.

"Hard to feel that way about someone you're never loved." replied Lily. At their questioning looks she continued "Those rumours that I mentioned before? Just because the Wizarding public dismissed them doesn't mean that there was never any truth to them."

Hannah's eyes widened "You mean you and my mother...?"

"Yes. And Luna's mother. And Hestia. We were all very close. Serena was always going to be married off to Xenophilus Lovegood, we all knew that and it was never a problem. Serena liked Xeno well enough, and for her what happened with us was always for the fun of it, same with Hestia. Sarah and I however were a different matter. The Wizarding society here in Britain has never been one to tolerate lesbianism unless within special circumstances, like both being married to the same wizard, so by the end of our sixth year we were already making plans to head off to Australia once we finished school. They're much more tolerant there and we would be free of the war. Unfortunately four days before Christmas break during seventh year, disaster struck both of us. With us being so close and Muggle-born our parents had gotten to know each other and got along together brilliantly. That, sadly, meant that when the Lucius



Malfoy, after several years of being a Death Eater, led a group of Death Eaters in search of my parents, Sarah's were there too.

"Dumbledore immediately swept in to "rescue" us. I was to be taken in by the Potter family and Sarah by the Abbott family. Of course, given how each family's only son had taken such a liking to each of us, they wasted no time in trapping us into marriage contracts that we couldn't get out of, especially with Dumbledore acting in loco parentis to sign the contracts for both of us."

"I guess that explains why you wanted Harry out of Dumbledore's reach." said Cho.

Lily gave a nod "I don't have any proof that Dumbledore somehow got my parents' location to Malfoy, but if I ever do..." she trailed off.

Harry reached out and took his mother's hand in his "We've already got Malfoy mum." said Harry "And his son is next. Dumbledore is nearly ruined as well, thanks to Hermione."

Lily nodded, a single tear rolling down her cheek.

"When Charlotte and Isabella were born I did all I could for them, but there was no hiding them. They got swept up in the fame and adulation just as much as their father. Luckily Dumbledore never took much of an interest in them. Thankfully once they got out of Hogwarts and into the real world they calmed down."

"Do they know?" asked Neville.

Lily nodded "About Arnold, yes. Everything else, not so much. I can't risk them telling James."

"When Harry finally went off to Hogwarts, I knew I'd have to be on guard. The world was about to realise that there were two Potter sons. Thankfully I've always been good with House Elves and got them to lace all the food and drink served in the Great Hall that night with Calming Draughts. That coupled with a few mild Notice-Me-Not spells on Harry really kept things calm. Serena once spent a month teaching both Harry and Luna how to control their auras. By the time Harry went to Hogwarts he had enough control to blend in, and just appear to be another nameless face in a crowd. A couple of House Elves kindly consented to scan all the mail leaving the school over

the next month and pretty soon everyone once again forgot about Harry Potter. Not even Dumbledore noticed; no matter what he and his fans think, he is rather easy to outsmart; especially when he was so focussed on Arnold.

"When Harry made friends with Hermione everything suddenly began to come together. With her help Harry began to gather the lonely, the bullied and the muggle-born. By the end of the year Padma, Sally-Anne and Su Li had become Harry and Hermione's best friends. At first I was a little concerned that they were all girls, but then it began to make sense. Harry was practically invisible to those he did not want to see him, so for all intents and purposes it would seem like Hermione was the leader of the group. Having the group be all female made them stand out a bit less. The following year Luna had arrived at Hogwarts, projecting a mask of oddness that kept most at bay. Harry, of course, was used to this and dragged her into the group where she blossomed. This year a few more joined the group: Morag and Katherine MacDougal, Lisa Turpin, Libby Moon and Fay Dunbar along with the first male inductees: Wayne Hopkins and Stephen Cornfoot. It was also this year that Harry began teaching his friends the spells that I had taught him before Hogwarts.

"Each year brought the same format: Arnold and his friends would find themselves in deadly situations, facing Trolls, Basilisks, Dementors and insane Professors, barely escaping with their lives, whilst Harry's group grew larger and he taught them all he could.

"Then their fourth year happened; bringing with it the Tri-Wizard Tournament. It did not take a genius to work out Voldemort's involvement when Arnold's name came out of the Goblet of Fire, and for Harry it meant a change in pace. It was obvious that Voldemort's return was nearing, so Harry began sneaking out of Hogwarts during the evening, usually accompanied by more than a few of his friends, and meeting up with me and a few of my friends in the Shrieking Shack where we taught them as much extra magic as possible.

"When Voldemort did return finally, I knew it was time to get Harry out of Hogwarts. Hermione, Luna and the others agreed to keep their group going, but Harry, I knew, would need to begin much more rigorous training that was available at Hogwarts."

She turned to Harry "But that was no reason to nearly flunk the end of year's exams."

Harry shrugged "I knew I knew the stuff. Having it on paper at the Ministry just gave more of a chance that Voldemort would find out what I could do too."

Lily shook her head in dismay before turning back to her audience "Over the next few years we discovered just how Voldemort survived on Halloween 1981. He made several Horcruxes, items containing pieces of his soul, and hid them away. We've found and destroyed all of them apart from one: Voldemort's Snake. Once it dies, Voldemort will be mortal once again. But in order to get to the snake, Harry had to get to Voldemort, and in order to get to Voldemort, he has to get by the Death Eaters, Dementors, Giants, Werewolves and other dark creatures."

"Since leaving school our group has gradually increased in size and influence gaining allies in all shapes and forms." said Hermione "The final push against Voldemort is coming soon, and what we want to know is will you join us?"

Neville sat studying Harry's group for a good few minutes. Then he stood and walked calmly around to Harry's end of the table and held out his hand.

"We're with you."

Harry grasped his hand and shook.

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That evening when they were ready for bed, Neville looked up at Hannah "So your mother's been alive all this time?"

Hannah nodded.

"Would've been nice to have had her at the wedding."

"She was there Neville." said Hannah "Remember that grey-haired old lady I introduced to you as my great aunt Hortense? Well that was mum under polyjuice. She wanted to be there and didn't want to cause a riot."

"Huh." was Neville's reply "Well I'd like very much to meet the real her sometime."

"I'll look into it." said Hannah tucking herself in beneath the blankets "Oh and we had better remember to send an owl off to Hogwarts tomorrow morning. In all the excitement of this afternoon we've forgotten to inform Franklin and Alison about the attack."

"Don't worry, Gran already saw to that." said Neville, getting into bed next to his wife.

"Oh good." said Hannah before leaning over to give him a kiss goodnight.

After a few moments of silence Neville voiced a thought.

"Hey, Han?"

"Yup?"

"Seeing as we came so close to death today, do you think we could, um, you know?"

Hannah was silent for a few moments before nodding her head and getting out of bed again "Alright. Just let me get a contraceptive potion. We don't want another panic like last month."

She did not see it, but behind her as she left the room Neville began excitedly pumping his fist in the air, thinking I get to have sex tonight!

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In the bedroom of a small house on the outskirts of the village of Littleton in Somerset, sex was also on the menu and was already well underway. With Luna already in what could only be described as a post-sex coma, Harry was doing his damned hardest to make sure Hermione wound up in the same state.

It worked too, for half an hour later Hermione was cuddled up to Harry's side sound asleep.

He might not have been the celebrity of the family, but as far as Harry Potter was concerned, his life was pretty spectacular.

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Sex was also on the menu at Potter Manor. James was out of the house for the night, so Lily had sent out some invites; Hestia and Serena had arrived together, eager for a night of girl-on-girl fun. Lily had just gotten the bottle of wine open when the fireplace flared green and Sarah Willsher tumbled out. The woman didn't even have time to dust herself off before her long-time lover Lily pulled her in for a searing kiss.

The fireplace flared again and Narcissa Black, widow of Lucius Malfoy, exited the floo system, carrying several bottles of the most luxurious wine.

"What's all this Cissy?" asked Lily.

"A double celebration." announced Narcissa "One: the major dent put into Voldemort's ranks and the swelling of young Harry's forces. And two, I received this."

She handed Lily a letter.

It happens tonight.

A.P.G

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Daphne Greengrass stood by Astoria's bedside as her younger sister downed the purple potion. Across from her Astoria's husband Draco Malfoy watched intently. The potion was one often used by purebloods in desperate need of an heir. It sped up the gestation period from nine months to just three hours. It was incredibly risky for the mother, but Astoria wanted to do it, Draco wanted her to do it, and most importantly potions mistress Daphne Greengrass and healer Tracey Davis knew how to do it.

Over the next three hours nutrient potions, amongst others, were poured down Astoria's throat by Daphne whilst Tracey kept up a steady stream of incantations to ensure that everything went okay.

And then the labour began. Fortunately there were spells to make this a quick and virtually painless process. The moment the clock in the hall chimed midnight, little baby Nathaniel gave his first scream, signalling to all that he had arrived.

After checking the both mother and baby over, Tracey hurried into another room, only to return later with Seren Roper, a former Slytherin who had been in the same year as Daphne and Tracey. Seren now worked at the Ministry within the Department of Magical Families. She recorded the birth, had the certificate signed by Astoria, Draco, Daphne and Tracey and then took her leave. Tracey took the baby from the room.

Without a word to his wife, and without any sign of concern for her wellbeing, Draco stood and made his way towards the door. He knew that Astoria would be pretty much out of it for a good while, and Daphne would fuss over her. Perhaps once she had finished checking the baby he could talk Tracey into having a quick shag. She was a lowly half-blood after all. She should feel honoured that an upstanding pure-blooded wizard like him would give her the time of day.

And if that failed, there was always the Imperious Curse.

That thought was his last in life. Two green flashes lit up the room and a moment later Draco Malfoy hit the ground dead.

^v^v^v

A tapping on the window pulled Harry from his slumber. He got up, made his way over to the window, opened it and took the note from the owl.

Unfurling it, he read

It's done.

A.P.G

It was with an extra-large smile on his face that Harry Potter returned to bed after giving the owl a treat.

Voldemort did not realise it yet, but he had just lost control of the Malfoy family fortune, and thus a pretty large portion of his funding.

Definitely a great day.

A/N: So how's that then? Good? Bad? Let me know. Hopefully everything made sense. I think it did. You should have just about all your answers now.

## Chapter 16: Plotting.

### The Daily Prophet

#### Longbottom Manor Attacked.

by Andy Smudgley

In a shocking move yesterday afternoon the dark forces of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named attacked Longbottom Manor, ancestral home of the Noble and Most Ancient House of Longbottom, in what is believed to have been an attempt to destroy one of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named's most powerful opponents, Augusta Longbottom, a member of the Wizengamot believed to be the ranking second to new Chief Warlock Tiberius Ogden.

The move backfired, however. Madam Longbottom was not home at the time of the attack, and her Grandson Neville Longbottom led a successful counter attack. Mr Longbottom and his wife Hannah were hosting a group of guests when the attack began, and all of them rallied together to fight back. The result was an impressive victory which saw more than a hundred Death Eaters lose their lives. Amongst those killed were Augustus Rookwood, Amadeus Nott, Alexander Jugson, Kevin Travers and the notorious Rodolphus and Rabastan Lestrange, all of whom were known to have been a part of the inner-circle of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. Also confirmed amongst the dead was the Werewolf Fenrir Greyback, a serial child-killer.

Many of those defending Longbottom Manor lost their lives as well, but their loss was not in vain, as this has been the most significant victory for the light side in years.

For further reading, turn to pages 2, 3, 4 & 5

Lord Voldemort sat on his back throne in the middle of a darkened room. He was deep in thought.

It was more than a week ago that his forces had suffered the greatest loss that they had ever sustained, in this war or the first. More than a hundred Death Eaters, including six of Voldemort's inner circle, had been slaughtered by the forces that defended Longbottom Manor. That the Dementors had not returned was even



more troubling. One hundred of them were now missing; that was equal to half the number that Voldemort had originally coaxed from Azkaban a decade and a half ago. This, added to the loss of seven Death Eaters just a few days before the raid when they had attempted to assassinate Hermione Granger, meant that Voldemort's forces were beginning to crack. Both Amycus and Bellatrix were becoming slowly more deranged than ever, ignoring the bigger picture and instead focusing on their desires for revenge. The deaths of so many of their kind meant that others were beginning to have their doubts about following Voldemort, and his torturing of those who doubted him only made them doubt him further.

The Werewolves were another matter. With their leader, Fenrir Greyback and his two most notorious followers, Andrew Kessler and Russell McDermott dead, the rest of the pack were becoming unwilling to cooperate. Instead they were interested only in who would become the new leader of their pack, and Voldemort knew that most of them were hoping for one who would lead them from the Dark Lord and his followers.

Voldemort was at a loss. When he ruled, he ruled through fear, but now no amount of fear could change the fact that he had been the leader of those now dead men, and he had led them wrong. Very wrong. Without the fear, Voldemort had little idea as to how to get his followers to obey. Though perhaps a few raids on Muggle settlements were bolster their faith in him. After all, the victims would be Muggles; what could go wrong?

That solution decided upon, he turned his mind to another problem: money. Most of those within his inner-circle were very well off and it was they that financed Voldemort's campaign. Unfortunately most of the best financiers, such as Nott, Rookwood, Goyle and the Lestrangle brothers were now dead, and their family vaults within Gringotts bank had been sealed until final Wills and Testaments could be read, so not even their own families could gain access. Voldemort could of course order a raid on the bank in an attempt to force the Goblins to open the vaults, but he was fairly certain that all that that would achieve would be the Goblins locking Gringotts completely, and more dead Death Eaters.

There was one other who could provide financial aid, but for some reason Draco Malfoy seemed to have disappeared. In fact it had

been a week since news broke of Draco's wife giving birth, but none of the family had been seen since. Voldemort could not help but wonder if the Malfoy family's disappearance had anything to do with the successful counter-attack they had experienced at Longbottom Manor. The battle and the birth had happened on the same day, after all.

\\\\\\

The truth of the matter was that Draco Malfoy was dead. Very dead.

But he would not be that way for long.

As she, Sarah, Serena, Hestia and Narcissa carved intricate runes onto the body; Lily Potter pondered the event that had resulted in this.

Harry Potter had just finished leading Neville and his friends around Gryffindor Manor, the base of operations for The Undesirables, when the a Port-Key brought Daphne, Astoria and Tracey into the room, complete with a sleeping baby and a definitely dead Draco Malfoy.

After checking that the three women and the baby were alright, Harry had contacted his mother, who in turn had rounded up Sarah, Serena, Hestia and Narcissa and brought them to the manor.

Whilst Astoria and Narcissa began doting on the baby, Hannah had asked why Draco was dead.

"So that we can take the Malfoy fortune from Voldemort." Luna had answered.

It was then that Hannah had made the suggestion that had changed everything.

"Why don't you re-animate him and use him as a spy?"

Harry had loved the idea. The Goblins would already know that Draco was dead, so officially all the money had already gone to Astoria and baby Nathaniel.

So long as Draco was had some money to hand over from time to time, Voldemort would be none-the wiser. That Luna knew how to get her hands on a few Leprechauns made the idea of giving Voldemort money a lot easier on the mind.

The only whole idea had only one flaw; the Goblins. If they invited a lot of people to the will reading of Draco Malfoy, then him turning up alive would certainly raise a few eyebrows.

Fortunately Harry has an in with the Goblins. They owed him a lot considering they had told Dumbledore and Snape where he lived, and Harry had many demands for them to fulfil in order for them to make up for their mistake. When Griphook mentioned that Dumbledore absolved them of any wrong-doing and that they could face no penalty from the ministry, Harry had an answer for them.

"Dumbledore's finished, and his little note does not free you from personal revenge."

Following that, Ragnock had ordered that will of Draco Malfoy be read only to Astoria and Narcissa, and has also ordered a longer-than-normal lockdown on the vaults of the other recently deceased Death Eaters.

With the money safely in the hands of Astoria and Narcissa, and group of Leprechauns ready to produce some fake Galleons, all that remained was to Lily and her friends to finish the last few runes on Draco Malfoy's body.

\\\\\\

With Amelia Bones, Cornelius Fudge and Augusta Longbottom agreeing with him, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot Tiberius Ogden addressed the defendant.

"Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, for knowingly protecting a confirmed Death Eater, this court hereby sentences you to three-hundred hours of community service, and orders you to pay a fine of seven-hundred thousand galleons to the Ministry."

The bang of the gavel signalled the end of the hearing, and Albus Dumbledore felt his heart sink. How had things gotten this bad?

As she left the courtroom, Amelia could not help but feel a little disappointed. She had been unable to get anything real on Dumbledore, and the law stated that they could not hold Dumbledore for any longer than they had without giving him a trial. It was a stupid law, but it was one voted by purebloods for purebloods.

She would just have to wait and see if she could find anything later.

^V^V^

Neville dragged Seamus down behind the large rock as the spells slammed into the surfaces around them. Moments later Dean, Lavender and Cho were able to join them. Neville looked around frantically, his mind searching desperately for a way to counter-strike. He forced himself to not look at Hannah, her body flat on the ground and unmoving. Just a little away from her was Parvati, and a little further along Justin.

Beyond Justin, Neville could see Ernie, Susan and Romilda hiding behind a large fallen tree trunk, which was rotten and would not last long. Katie and Megan had fallen elsewhere on the battlefield, and Neville had no idea where the rest were.

The attack on the rock ended as the enemy focused all of their attention on the fallen tree trunk. Dean and Cho peered over the top to strike back but were instantly hit by spells and they fell to the ground. Just because the enemy was concentrating on a different point, it did not mean that they were not watching.

A final reductor spell destroyed the tree trunk and a spell slammed into Romilda. Ernie instantly got a shield up whilst Susan frantically returned fire.

A repeated barrage of spells exploded against Ernie's shield until it collapsed and he was dropped to the ground. Susan got a few more spells off before being forced to shield.

Lavender and Seamus made a joint move and managed to fire off several spells at their opponents before being forced to shield when Susan's shield broke and she fell.

"Get down!" Neville shouted to his only two remaining companions, but it was too late. An explosion hex blew apart a chunk of the rock,

sending broken pieces and dust into the air. Seamus and Lavender were both distracted and accidentally dropped their shields. Both were dropped to the ground seconds later.

Spells continued to hammer against the rock, and Neville knew that it would not last much longer. Several larger pieces broke off, giving him an idea.

A wide arcing swish levitated the rocks into the air and a sharp jabbing motion has them flying towards the opponents. Neville had no way of knowing if they hit.

A few more hits and what was left of the rock broke. Not sparing a beat Neville banished the last remains towards his opponents before frantically firing off a volley of powerful spells in return, but it was only a matter of moments before a spell struck him and he slumped over, all around him going dark.

^V^V^

Ginny Weasley sat in her childhood bedroom in the Burrow, holding her head in her hands. She was in a bad situation and she knew it.

Her would-be husband Arnold Potter was dead, killed by the hand of Lord Voldemort, and now her family had fallen apart over whose fault it was.

Worst of all, the baby she was carrying was not even Arnold's, and she felt immensely guilty that she had never told him.

There was some kind of twisted logic behind the betrayal, however. For ten years she had been trying to get pregnant, but it seemed that Arnold was not up to task. All Ginny had done was get a donor, of sorts.

But she still felt horrible for doing it.

^V^V^

"Ennervate."

With that word, the light returned to Neville's world. Groggily he sat up and looked up at Harry Potter, who was standing a few feet in

front of him, an amused expression on his face as he playfully twirled his wand in his fingers.

"Well I must say that it was not a bad effort on your part." said Harry  
"A most impressive display. You certainly have trained yourselves well."

Wearily Neville looked around, seeing his friends either awake or being awoken. The training exercise had been intense to say the least.

He noticed Wayne Hopkins, one of Harry's group being fed a potion by Daphne.

"What happened to him?" he asked.

Harry gave a chuckle "You did. Those rocks you banished at us? One got him. Nailed him right between the eyes."

"Oh." Neville replied before calling out "Sorry Wayne."

"Don't sweat it." Wayne called back "You put me down, that was the point."

Suddenly a Patronus in the form of a Dove arrived in the room, and the voice of Lily Potter spoke out.

"He's ready."

\\\\\\

The group arrived in one of the unused bedrooms. There on the bed lay Draco Malfoy, with many runes carved into his skin. The runes on his left arm were glowing faintly, signalling that they had been activated. One by one the other runes on the corpse began to glow.

Moments later, Draco's eyes snapped open and he sat up as the runes faded into invisibility.

A smirk playing on her lips, Lily turned to Luna "Get the Leprechauns."

\\\\\\

The moment his presence within Nott Manor was discovered, Draco Malfoy was bound and dragged before Lord Voldemort.

"Ah, so you have returned." remarked Voldemort.

Draco nodded.

"For more than a week you are missing, constantly disobeying my summons and now you turn up here unannounced. Why?"

"Forgive me my Lord. I had much personal business to attend to." replied Draco.

"And what might that have been?" demanded Voldemort.

"My wife." replied Draco "She ran off, taking our new born son with her. I was trying to get her back."

Voldemort held no sympathy "I warned you not to marry her. Not with her sister being who she is."

That was not true, of course, Voldemort had encouraged the marriage in the hopes of using Astoria Greengrass to find her sister Daphne.

Draco hung his head in shame "I believe it was her sister who provided her with an escape route. She was there at the birth."

Voldemort scowled "What is it with the Malfoy's and their not being able to keep control of their wives? First your father loses Narcissa, and now you lose Astoria."

Draco said nothing.

"You are also late in paying." observed Voldemort.

"I have them money." replied Draco "Triple the usual amount in fact, to make up for my absence."

Voldemort unbound him and Draco reached into his robes to pull out a shrunken bag, which he handed over to Voldemort.

Voldemort resized the bag, and tipped the contents over the floor. Impressed he summoned two other Death Eaters. The pair replaced the galleons into the bag and carried it off to the vault in the cellar. There they tipped it onto the heap of gold already held within and then left. None of them ever realised that the coins all vanished within the next hour.

Voldemort surveyed Draco for a few more moments before giving a small nod "You are forgiven for now. But let this serve as a reminder of what awaits those who desert me. Crucio!"

\\\\\\

Severus Snape had no idea how long he had been down here, but he was fairly certain that it had been at least a week since someone had last come to see him. He was fiercely hungry, but fortunately that Luna woman had been kind enough to leave a bucket of water for him. He had refrained from drinking from it for as long as possible, for he did not know what else besides water lay within. After two days though, thirst had won out. Thankfully he did not seem to be presenting any of the effects of any of the multitude of potions and poisons that he knew of.

A loud clunking sound from above told him that the trap door was about to open. When it did, he was almost blinded from the sunlight that made its way down to him.

Someone came down through the hole, and he was quite shocked by who it was.

"Hello Sev."

"Lily." he gasped.

A/N: And that'll do I think. I know it's a little short, but so much has happened. Let me know what you think.



## Chapter 17: The Fate of Severus Snape

Severus Snape struggled frantically as he was dragged through the atrium of the Ministry but his captors, Susan Bones and Hannah Abbott held on tightly, refusing to allow him to escape.

Aurors appeared on the scene and moved to take him into custody.

"Where did you find him?" Amelia asked her niece once the other Aurors had arrived and dragged Snape off towards the holding cells.

"Hermione Granger contacted me." replied Susan "Said she had gotten everything out of the man that she could, but wanted Aurors to take him. I volunteered and Hannah joined me. Granger says she'd be more than happy to come in and answer a few questions, if you'd like? She said she'd be available tomorrow."

Amelia nodded "I do have more than a few things that I need to ask her. Alright, ask her to come by tomorrow."

"I'll tell her." said Susan "I'll be her escort if that's alright? I'll bring her in just before my shift begins."

"That's fine." replied Amelia "In the meantime; I think I'll be asking Snape a few questions of my own."

As Amelia headed off towards the holding cells, Susan and Hannah headed off deeper into the Ministry.

"Level one, Minister for Magic and Support Staff." proclaimed the voice of the Lift as the gates rattled open.

Susan and Hannah stepped out.

There were no signs of anyone on the floor, but a door to the side opened and Percy Weasley, the Junior Assistant to the Minister for Magic stepped out, carrying a stack of parchments.

His eyes landed on the pair, but Susan already had her wand up "Stupefy."

Percy dropped to the ground, his papers going everywhere.

"Obliviate." hissed Hannah, pointing her wand at Percy's head. The idiot would have no memory of seeing them.

In that same moment another door opened and a hideous toad-like woman came marching out, apparently drawn by the noise of Percy collapsing.

"What is..." she began.

"Imperio." growled Susan and the foul woman's words faded on her tongue as Susan's strength and will took control of her mind.

"In the office." Susan ordered in a whisper and the woman complied.

Hannah followed, but not before casting another spell at Percy. As the door to the Senior Undersecretary's Office shut, Percy awoke. Seeing all the parchments scattered everywhere, he realised that he must have tripped over. Red faced and very glad that no-one was around to see him, he hurriedly gathered up all of the parchment and retreated back into his office in order to put them all back in order once again.

Inside the Senior Undersecretary's office Susan ordered the woman to sit down. She complied.

"You are Dolores Jane Umbridge, Senior Undersecretary to the Minister for Magic, and you will act as so until nine o'clock this evening." ordered Susan "At that time you will make your way down to the Ministry holding cells. You will stun the guard and free Severus Snape from his cell. Afterwards, you will go home. Do you understand?"

Umbridge nodded.

Satisfied, Susan and Hannah took their leave, not being spotted again until they arrived back on the atrium floor, where their appearance drew little attention.

Both made their way over to the fireplaces and used the floo system to leave the building.

Both arrived in the Manor house where Harry Potter stood waiting for them, a large snake draped across his shoulders.

"Is it done?" he asked.

"Yes." replied Susan with a nod "By midnight at the latest, two evil men will be dead, one of the worst influences in the Ministry will lose all her power, and she and a traitor will quickly find their way to Azkaban."

"Excellent." said Harry, setting the snake down and letting it crawl away "Mother has confirmed the location of our prey. She will be in position at the appropriate time, as will I. You two just need to make sure to be waiting for Umbridge to return home. It will not do for the Aurors to find the imperious curse, or that she has memories of either of you being on that floor of the Ministry."

The two women nodded and left. Although they were very much aligned with Harry now, and had a high amount of respect for him, neither of them counted him as a friend yet, and both felt awkward being alone around him, especially with that snake around.

^W^W^

To say that Minerva McGonagall was unhappy with the situation was an understatement. After all that had happened in recent times, letting that man back into the school seemed to be a very bad decision, but ever since Albus Dumbledore had been fired, the Ministry was keeping a very close eye on things at Hogwarts, and it was a case of what they say goes. This apparently also meant that they were free to place Dumbledore back inside the walls of the school in order to serve his community service by cleaning up after the students without magic.

At least Minerva was able to console herself with the knowledge that the man had no wand and was shackled with magical suppressors that prevented even wizards as powerful as Dumbledore from performing wandless magic.

She also had enough control to ensure that he was kept well away from all students at all times.

Thank Merlin for small mercies.

^W^W^

"Well, well. How the mighty have fallen, eh Dumbledore?" laughed Argus Filch as he shoved a dirty mop and bucket into the old wizard's hands "You'll be starting in that broom closet down the hall there. A couple of seventh years decided it would be funny to get a third year drunk on fire whiskey last night. That broom closet is where she threw up."

With a cackle and a slight spring in his step (well as much as can be expected from a man suffering from rheumatism) the caretaker of Hogwarts walked away, leaving the former headmaster feeling quite low.

How the mighty had fallen indeed.

^V^V^V

Nobody noticed that Madam Umbridge did not leave the Ministry at five pm as was usual, but nobody particularly cared. The insufferable woman did little to endear herself to others and probably would not be missed if she threw herself in front of the Hogwarts Express.

At nine pm exactly she left her office and headed down to the Ministry holding cells. The few people who patrolled the building at night paid her no mind. When she arrived at the holding cells, the guard was facing away from her, and she wasted no time in stunning him. She hurried over to the cell containing Severus Snape and opened it. She then left hurriedly. Snape exited his cell, took the wand from the stunned Auror and made his escape.

On his way out Snape had to stun three people before they could raise the alarm. Personally he would have preferred to have killed them, but she said that doing so would mean that the deal was off.

He made it to the floo and vanished through.

^V^V^V

Dolores Umbridge arrived home in her lonely house, only to be hit in the back with a stunner, curtsey of Hannah Abbott. Susan Bones removed the imperious curse from the woman and Hannah wiped the both of them from her mind. As far as Umbridge would know,

what little of her actions tonight that she was aware of were done of her own accord.

^W^W^

Snape tumbled out of the fireplace in the Muggle-Studies office at Hogwarts. The familiar aura of Lily Evans (he refused to think of her as Potter) filled his senses as she helped him up.

"You remember our agreement?" she asked him.

"Yes." he replied.

"Astronomy Tower." she said "Go."

Snape left.

Lily turned and began to wipe all traces to recent floo activity from her fireplace.

^W^W^

Minerva McGonagall was just enjoying a drink of hot chocolate with Filius Flitwick and Pomona Sprout when Argus Filch entered the office.

"Headmistress, I cannot find Dumbledore."

"What do you mean?" asked Minerva "Where is he?"

"I left him mopping out the toilets on the fourth floor, someone went in there after eating some puking pastels, whilst I went to clean up some graffiti outside the Library. When I went to check on him he was gone. I've already got a few of the House Elves and Sir Nicholas looking for him, but I thought that you would want to know as well."

With a weary sigh Minerva set her cup down and got to her feet "You've done the right thing, Argus. Come."

The four of them left the office.

^W^W^

As he climbed the staircase to the top of the Astronomy Tower, Severus Snape could not help but think of the meeting he had had with Lily Potter the day before.

"Hello Sev."

"Lily." he gasped "What are you doing here?"

"In case you didn't realise it, Sev, the cottage above you is my son's home." Lily Potter replied.

"Your son?"

"Harry. My favourite child."

"I thought Arnold..."

"No. Arnold was never my favourite. He was James's, and everyone else's, but never mine. Harry was always the one that I could be proud of, the one who strove to be the best. Arnold was always too much like his father."

Snape could not help the smirk that appeared on his lips. Any insult to James or Arnold Potter always brought that reaction out in him.

"But what about the fame and the money? Surely that's all down to Arnold?"

"True. But I've never really enjoyed it."

"And all those photographs and interviews that you've given by the bucket load over the last three decades? You've always seemed to have enjoyed them."

Lily shrugged her shoulders "I've never enjoyed them. That was all an act. You know, me being the model wife and mother of a celebrity."

"All an act?" asked Snape, sounding hopeful.

"Hmm." Lily hummed as she nodded in agreement "But to be honest, lately I've become a little bored with it."

"You have?"

"Yeah. All the fame, all the photos, all the interviews... I'm never left alone. I'm thinking of leaving James, and heading elsewhere, you know, like America or Australia. Somewhere where I'm not known."

Snape's heart soared. She would leave that arrogant berk Potter.

"I'd have to leave James because there's no way he would come with me. He loves all the fame too much. But I'm scared of going alone."

"I'm sure you'll find someone." said Snape "You are still a very beautiful woman."

Lily nodded and said "You know, I had thought about asking you."

"Me?" he tried so hard to keep the hopeful tone out of his voice.

"Yes. I've always cherished the memories of the friendship we had when we were kids, and I know that you have never been in the best of positions in life, so I was thinking of asking you to come with me."

Snape's heart was really soaring now; he honestly could not remember the last time he had felt so happy. It might even have been the first time in his entire existence that he had felt this way.

"But there are two problems." said Lily.

And Snape's joy had deflated like a punctured water balloon.

"What are they?" he asked.

"Well, for one that dark mark on your arm. The Death Eaters Sev. Really?"

He had had the good grace to be ashamed.

"And of course there is the more recent issue, which is far more pressing." She lifted her head to look him directly in the eye "You led an attack on Hermione Granger; the love of my son Harry's life. I'm not sure if I could betray him by running off with you."

"But..." said Snape, "But there must be something that I can do. Some way in which I can put this right. The girl wasn't hurt, right?"

"Physically? No. But she has been an emotional wreck since."

Snape hung his head.

Silence prevailed for a good minute or so before Lily spoke again.

"Well, the first thing you can do is renounce the Dark Lord who calls himself Voldemort."

"Done." replied Snape.

"And the second is something that only the toughest of men will do."

"What is it? I'll do anything."

Lily watched him carefully for a few moments before responding "There were two masters who sanctioned your attack on Hermione Granger, where there not?"

Snape nodded emphatically.

Lily leaned forward "Dumbledore has escaped prison and has left you out hanging, so to speak. To prove to me that I can trust you, you must do one thing."

"What?"

"Kill Albus Dumbledore."

Everything from that moment on had been about getting Severus Snape to where he was now: climbing the staircase to the top of the Astronomy Tower of Hogwarts, where Dumbledore unknowingly awaited his death.

^^^

Albus Dumbledore stood atop the Astronomy Tower looking out across the darkened grounds of Hogwarts wondering where everything had gone wrong.



The obvious answer was when he sanctioned the murder of Hermione Granger by Professor Snape. But if he was honest it was a lot further back in time than that. Further back than when Arnold Potter had been killed by Lord Voldemort, further back even than that fateful Halloween night when Lord Voldemort had attacked the Potter's at Godric's Hollow. Remus Lupin had never been the same following that night, when his girlfriend Georgina Samson was killed by Voldemort whilst she tried to protect the children she had been babysitting.

No, everything had really begun to go wrong that day, so many years ago, when he, Albus Dumbledore, had gone to a small, poorly funded Muggle Orphanage in the middle of one of the poorest parts of London in order to tell a little boy named Tom Marvolo Riddle about the Wizarding World and his place in it.

Tom never knew, but being an orphan meant that his education at Hogwarts was paid for by donations to the school; special funding schemes designed to allow those poorer than most to attend the prestigious school. Were it not for such things, it was likely that Tom Riddle would never have come to Hogwarts. And, Dumbledore thought, the world would probably have been a far better place for it.

Movement on the grounds caught Dumbledore's eye, but with his magic repressed, he could not see that it was Lily Potter, hurrying towards the school's main gates.

That was not the only side effect of his magic being repressed; he also could not detect the compulsion charms that Lily Potter had placed on his mop that had made him decide to come up here at this particular time.

Little did he know, the moment he placed his hands on that mop handle this morning, his fate had been sealed.

The sound of approaching footsteps caught his attention, and he turned towards the staircase to see a most surprising person.

"Severus?"

"Good evening, Dumbledore."

Instantly Dumbledore's mind latched onto a solution to his temporary problems. He had heard tell this afternoon that Snape had been handed over to the Ministry. That he was here meant that the man had escaped, and if he, Dumbledore, was the one to bring Snape back in, then he would regain all the glory and adulation that he so rightly deserved.

Suddenly his mind decided to point out that he did not have a wand and Snape did.

Blinking at that sudden realisation, Albus Dumbledore found himself staring at the business end of Snape's wand.

"I'm sorry, Albus." said Snape "But it has to be like this."

"But why?" asked Dumbledore.

"For Lily." replied Snape.

"No." gasped Dumbledore, realising what was causing Severus to act like this "No... Severus, please!"

"Avada Kedavra!"

A jet of green light shot from the tip of Snape's wand and slammed into the former headmaster's chest, sending him soaring over the parapet and down towards the ground, many feet below.

Stowing his wand Severus ran.

He went undetected until the fourth floor corridor when a House Elf spotted him and shouted out his location. Remembering Lily's desire for no innocent victims Snape settled for stunning the little bugger and running on.

Apparently the House Elf had been heard, and people began to come running. The Seventh year Hufflepuff prefect Holly Steel nearly got him in the neck with a piercing hex as he ran by, but it missed by an inch.

In the Entrance Hall he had to shield from a rather nasty hex from Slughorn and then hit the man with a full body-bind.

As he ran across the grounds he came under a rain of spell fire from those who had made it to the entrance steps. He could hear McGonagall calling him a coward and to come back and fight like a man for a chance.

The word coward stung worse than any spell that had hit so far, but Snape kept running until he made it to the gate.

The noise got the dog in Hagrid's cabin barking like a lunatic, and the front door opened and the half-giant groundskeeper lumbered out, but Snape had already run by.

At the gates he met Lily. Merlin, she had never looked so beautiful.

"Is it done?" she asked, eagerly.

Snape nodded "Yes. He's dead."

"Good." replied Lily "And now for your fate."

"What?"

"Oh, Sevvv, you didn't really believe all that stuff about me wanting to run off to the other side of the world with you, did you?"

"I...I...no...but...you..."

"Goodbye, Severus Snape. Go to hell knowing that I hate every single fibre of your being."

"But...no...please...Look at me."

"Sectumsempra!"

The spell struck Snape from the left and he dropped to the ground, screaming in agony as deep slash marks appeared all over his skin.

Lily Potter stood over him, looking down upon his suffering without an ounce of pity or remorse on her face. Her son came to her side, lowering his wand.

"Nicely done, Harry." Lily complimented.

"Same to you." replied Harry before looking off to the side.

"Hagrid's coming."

With a swish of the cloak that was draped over his shoulders, Harry became invisible, moments before Rubeus Hagrid arrived. Fortunately it was dark and the man did not see Harry even before he put the cloak on.

"Lily, wha's 'appened?"

Lily put on a good act of a distraught witch "He just came running at me, and I remembered what he did to Hermione Granger and just reacted."

Hagrid placed a large hand comfortingly on her shoulder, though her knees nearly gave out when he gave her a pat.

"'S alrigh' Lily. You done wha' any of us would've. C'mon, let's get 'im up ter the castle. Per'aps Poppy can do summat fer 'im."

"Yeah," said Lily, giving a big sniff "Alright. Thanks Hagrid."

The large, bearded man gave her a reassuring smile and then bent low to scoop Snape up in his arms. Half way across the grounds they met with most of the other professors and a good number of prefects.

"What happened?" asked McGonagall.

"Lily got 'im with a nasty spell." replied Hagrid "There was no way 'e was getting' past 'er." there seemed to be a touch of pride in his voice.

McGonagall approached the fallen man in Hagrid's arms and saw that Snape did not have long.

"Professor McGonagall!"

The group turned to see the head boy and girl and a prefect running across the lawn towards them.

"What's the matter?" asked McGonagall.

"It's Dumbledore." said the Head Boy, Jack Taggart "He's dead."

"What?" asked Lily, sounding very distraught.

Severus Snape's last thought before he died was of how well and truly duped he had been. If he ever saw emerald eyes again, it would be far too soon.

^V^V^V

The following week passed quickly. In that time security at both Hogwarts and the Ministry was increased three-fold, whilst a mandatory questioning of all staff on duty that night, as ordered by both Scrimgeour and Amelia revealed the involvement of one Dolores Jane Umbridge in the freeing of Snape. By lucky coincidence, the Auror that she had stunned turned out to be a Death Eater sympathiser who had passed on the names of more than a dozen muggle-borns during his five year employment within the Ministry.

As Susan had told Harry, the result of that night was two evil men dead, Umbridge out of power and in Azkaban, and a traitorous Auror in the cell next to hers.

The funeral of Albus Dumbledore was a relatively low-key affair. Several people from both sides of the Order turned up, including James and Lily Potter, most of Hogwarts' staff attended, and so did a few Ministry officials, such as Amelia Bones.

Out of respect for the man that he used to be, rather than the man he became, Dumbledore's final wish was granted and he was laid to rest in a white tomb on a small island on the far side of the Black Lake. The spot gave a lovely view of Hogwarts.

^V^V^V

That night, under the cover of darkness, three people apparated onto the island and approached Dumbledore's Tomb.

A thrusting motion with a wand caused the top of the marble tomb to break away, revealing the body within.

Not realising what a powerful weapon it was, the Ministry had seen fit to lay Dumbledore to rest with his wand, which now resided in his hands as they lay clasped together over his chest.

A hand reached out and took the wand from Dumbledore's fingers and ran a gentle touch over its handle.

Standing up straight Harry Potter took a moment to admire the ornate markings on the ancient, powerful and revered Elder Wand. To either side of him, Hermione Granger and Luna Lovegood stood watching with keen interest.

A smile on his lips, Harry pointed the wand upwards and unleashed a long and powerful blast of lightning towards the sky.

The Elder Wand was now in the hands of its new master.

A/N. Well that seems to be a good enough place as any to leave this. What do you think? Apologies to and Snape lovers out there, but I do not like the man, and I find his obsession with Harry's mother to be very creepy. You'll notice that I kept the final words of both Snape and Dumbledore the same as they were in the books; I thought it fitting, especially given how both men are desperate when they say them, rather than resigned to their fates. And yes, the moment when Harry takes the Elder Wand out of Dumbledore's tomb is exactly the same as with Voldemort at the end of Deathly Hallows part 1, but to be honest a scene like that has been floating around in my mind ever since I saw the film; Harry, not Voldemort, taking the Elder wand for his own whilst Hermione and Luna look on, witnesses to his triumph. I know that some of you won't like it, but to me it was the best way to get Harry in control of the wand without using methods used by other writers a hundred times before (I've seen Harry kill/disarm Dumbledore and take the wand for his own before, but I've never seen him steal it from the grave.) Anyway, I hoped you enjoyed it, look out for Chapter 18 coming... some when (I won't promise anymore, as I think that the last few weeks have made me out to be a liar!)

## Chapter 18: When Giants Rampage

"You want to brand us with your mark?" asked Neville Longbottom, who was eyeing Harry Potter with no small amount of trepidation "Isn't that what Voldemort does to his followers?"

Harry laughed "You say that like it is a bad idea. If you think about it, it makes perfect sense. They can communicate to Voldemort through their marks, and he to them. He can also use the marks to summon them to his side. The Aurors have something similar with medallions, and the Order of the Phoenix use brooches. I believe that your group also uses something similar, in the form of fake galleons, correct?"

"Well, yeah," answered Neville "So why don't you use something like that, instead of a tattoo?"

Harry grinned "You're less likely to lose your arm."

"So you all have these tattoos?" asked Cho.

In answer Hermione, Luna, Padma, Sally-Anne, Daphne, Tracey, Libby, Fay, Lisa, Morag, Katherine, Stephen, Wayne and Ritchie all rolled up the sleeves on their left arms to expose the black tattoos there. At first they appeared to be nothing special, but upon closer examination Neville and the others could make out a large feline, an owl, a deer and an eagle, grouped together and standing strong.

"The cougar," explained Hermione "stands for leadership, courage, swiftness and balance. The owl stands for wisdom, truth and patience. The deer stands for love, kindness, purity of purpose and walking within the light. And the eagle stands for success, prosperity, power in battle and protection from evil."

"We like to think that it portrays what we're all about." added Harry "Luna designed it, rather beautiful, isn't it?"

"Yeah." agreed Parvati, but she didn't sound too sure.

The door of the room opened and Astoria entered "We've just had word from Draco. Voldemort moves to attack the village near Puddlemere United's training ground within the hour."

"A revenge raid?" suggested Neville.

Harry nodded "He likely needs to restore a bit of moral amongst the Death Eater ranks. Too bad we'll be there to crush them. Get everyone ready."

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The school bell rang, signalling the end of break time, and all the students of Puddletown First School lined up on the playground by year group to be led inside by their teachers. It was in that moment that a large part of the school roof was ripped off in a violent explosion.

In almost the same moment jets of purple mist swooped in amongst the frightened children, each jet formed into a person who each held a wand high; pulses of light emitting from the tips of sticks that they held. Each pulse of light expanded and held the falling rubble in place, ten feet above the quickly scattering children.

Several black plumes raced along the main street, parked cars exploding as they passed. One veered off and smashed through the windows of the convenience store and began to wreak havoc on the inside. Purple plumes came from the opposite direction and they clashed with full force.

At the village church, a group of mourners watched as their loved one was lowered into the ground. Their grief was quickly forgotten when an explosion caused the church tower to collapse. As the mourners ran, two purple plumes shot over their heads and engaged a pursuing black plume in combat.

Three more black plumes began circling the village pub, jets of light of varying colours firing from them and slamming against the building. Purple plumes came racing across the beer garden, jets of light shooting from them and slamming into the swirling black plumes.

At the other end of the village, students from the Middle school were sent running from the playing fields when a horde of ten club-wielding, twenty-five foot tall monsters came charging out of the trees. More purple plumes moved to intercept.



Amycus Carrow had been waiting eagerly to kill and maim ever since his sister Alecko had been killed in the botched assassination attempt on Hermione Granger. He had had to wait for it, but his master had provided. Their target was not an important one, but it would spread fear and pain and that was good enough for Amycus. It had been he who had blown apart the roof of the Primary School, and the terrified screams of the students had been like a good dose of pepper-up potion to the Death Eater. The elation was short lived, however, for an unknown group of wizards and witches arrived and had the nerve to shield the kids. Enraged, Amycus moved to make these fools realise just why Death Eaters were to be feared.

Neville and Seamus were paired together; keeping an eye out for danger. Ernie and Dean were nearby, as were Hannah and Susan, each on their guard. Lavender, Cho, Parvati, Katie, Angelina and Alicia still held their wands high, maintaining their protective barrier against the rubble whilst Lily, Sarah and Serena hurriedly began directing the students and staff to safety.

Amycus Carrow and three other Death Eaters charged forwards, their wands raised. Seamus deflected Amycus' Cruciatus curse and then Neville threw the man to the ground, bleeding heavily. The last thing that Amycus heard in his life were the three thumps that signalled that his three comrades had fallen as well.

Once the last of the Muggles were out from beneath the rubble, the shield was allowed to collapse and the rubble hit the ground. Lavender, Cho, Parvati, Katie, Angelina and Alicia moved off to join Lily, Sarah and Serena in protecting the group of Muggles whilst Neville, Seamus, Dean, Hannah, Susan and Ernie headed off into battle.

Harry, Hermione and Luna together raced along the high street towards the incoming Death Eaters. Each of them emitted a pulse of pure magic from their bodies which stunned the Death Eaters and dropped them to the ground. As Harry entered the village shop to bring down the Death Eater within, Hermione and Luna told the frightened Muggles to get to the field located behind the doctor's surgery.

Having taken down the Death Eater which had attacked the church, Padma and Sally-Anne sped off across the village to the Middle School, arriving just in time to join Daphne, Tracey, Astoria, Fay,

Morag, Katherine, Wayne, Stephen, Libby, Lisa, Ritchie, Oliver, Anthony and Justin as they sped towards the oncoming giants.

More and more Muggles were arriving at the field behind the doctor's surgery as Lily, Sarah and Serena now joined Hestia and Narcissa in quickly warding the area to prevent the Death Eaters from getting to them. Two Death Eaters raced towards them, but were quickly blown up in an explosion of flame courtesy of Lavender and Cho.

Colin's reductor curse nailed a Death Eater in the side of the head as Dennis and Demelza together brought down a second. Moments later Nigel, Rose and Vicky had thrown down the third. The village pub secured, they raced off to provide aid elsewhere.

The Higgs family name had always been somewhat of a joke within the Wizarding world. Oh sure, they were eleven generations pure, and sure they always signed up to support any Dark Lord that happened to be making a bid to control the world, but they were dumb, ugly, relatively poor and weak magically (a Muggleborn would point out that that was what you got for marrying your cousins over eleven generations, but that was something that would never cross the mind of a pure-blood elitist) with a penchant for churning out Squibs. In fact in the most recent generation, the squib-to-wizard ratio for the Higgs family was six-to-one, making them even more of a laughing stock. And so it was that Terrance Higgs, who along with his wife/cousin (and quite possibly half-sister) Winona were responsible for three of the six Squibs born into their family in recent years, was determined to prove himself today. Today the world would know his worth.

After soaring along the main street with a couple of his fellows, blowing up parked cars, he veered off to attack the village shop. Inside he knocked over the tinned food shelf, the fruit and veg shelf, blew up the ice cream fridge, held the girl behind the counter under the Cruciatus curse for a few moments, and then found himself crashing into the butcher's counter, where he bled out over a joint of lamb.

Terrence Higgs had been no match for Harry Potter.

With a mighty crash the first Giant fell, brought down in a hail of cutting curses, explosion spells and bombardment spells. Next to

him, two of his comrades were swinging their clubs angrily, trying to swat the purple plumes that raced in circles around them like gnats. Not once did they realise that they were being tied up with ropes until it was too late. Each plume raced away, pulling the ropes tight. The Giants' legs were pulled out from underneath them, and their arms and torsos were pulled downwards. Both crashed to the ground and were quickly tied down.

One Giant was hit in the side of the head by a bludgeoning spell. Thinking that the Giant next to him had hit him, he turned, raised his club and brought it down hard on the top of the other's head. The pair quickly began brawling, and a third joined in, quickly followed by a fourth and a fifth.

The final two Giants continued their rampage towards the school; one was quickly brought down by a mass of spell-fire, but the other continued on, crashing through a fence and charging towards the glass walls of the sports' hall/assembly hall. With a mighty roar he raised his club high and smashed it through the glass. He roared ferociously at the screaming students inside, but was quickly distracted by a shout.

"Hey! Ugly!"

The Giant turned to face Harry Potter, who was standing on the roof of the changing rooms, holding his wand level with the Giant's face. The first spell shot from the tip of the wand and caused the Giant's nose to explode. The great brute reared back, roaring in agony and anger, before raising his club, preparing to take a swing at Harry. But Harry was ready. A steady stream of powerful spells shot from the tip of his wand and slammed into the Giant's face, neck and chest.

Whimpering and wheezing, the Giant dropped his club, stumbled backwards a few steps, and then tumbled over backwards into the school's outdoor swimming pool, displacing most of the water in a tidal wave that drenched the surrounding area.

Harry lowered his wand, panting heavily.

"Bloody hell!"

Harry turned to look at the hole that the Giant had made in the fence. Neville stood there, mouth agape. With him were Seamus, Dean, Susan and Hannah, all of whom wore similar expressions. Next to them, though, were Hermione and Luna, whose faces were alight with pride. Padma and Sally-Anne were there too, smiling widely.

Harry tilted his head back a little, looking like a deer that was listening for danger.

Then he disappeared. Hermione and Luna followed suit.

Seconds later a band of Aurors, led by Amelia and Scrimgeour arrived. Then the Order of the Phoenix, led by Alastor Moody and James Potter arrived as well.

"Oh, sometimes I could kill those three." muttered Padma "Always leaving us to tidy things up."

"Same modus operandi as last time?" asked Susan.

Padma gave a weary nod. She hated dealing with the Ministry.

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The sheep barely flinched when Harry apparated into their field. Nor did they react when Hermione and Luna arrived. However the arrival of seven unconscious Giants sent them running.

Hermione glanced over them and then send a questioning look at Harry.

"What?" he asked "You think we can't put seven Giants to good use?"

"No, we can..." said Hermione, taking in a particularly wet one, "But where are the other three?"

"Dead." answered Harry "Besides, we had to leave something for the Ministry to clear up."

"But your mum could have turned them into something useful." said Luna.

"Turned what into something useful?"

Harry, Hermione and Luna turned to see that Lily, Sarah and Narcissa had arrived.

"The dead Giants." answered Hermione "We were thinking that you could do to them what you did to Arnold and Draco."

Lily nodded thoughtfully "It's possible. We'll have to see if we can pinch them from the Ministry later. Hey, maybe we should try and find where the Ministry buried those bastards that attacked Hermione in Hogsmeade."

"Sounds like a plan." answered Harry "Too bad we burnt those that attacked Longbottom Manor though. I'm sure Neville, Hannah and the others will get a kick out of using them to bring down Voldemort."

Sarah looked around "Where are Hannah and the others, anyway?"

"Oh, they're helping Padma sort things out with the Ministry." answered Harry.

"Padma's gonna be real pissed with you." said Luna.

Harry chuckled "Nah, she knows I love her."

"Oh, really?" asked Hermione, dangerously.

Harry held up his hand in a placating manner, but still said "Hey, is it so wrong for me to want to sample a bit of Indian spice?"

"Humph!" retorted Hermione grumpily, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Speaking of India," said Luna "Harry, we really should consider that trip to India. Those Nagas could really be useful. And if nothing else we cannot run the risk of Voldemort getting them on his side."

Harry nodded "Yeah, I suppose we'd better discuss it with Padma when she gets back."

"So long as that's all you talk about." remarked Hermione, moving off towards the cottage.

"Oh, don't be like that Hermione." said Harry, following her "You know you're my number one girl."

"Oh, really?" asked Luna.

Harry turned to her, opened his mouth, closed it, opened it again, closed it again, and then turned to his mother "I can't win!"

"It's your own fault." replied Lily, heading inside.

"Oh, so it's okay for you to have a harem of females, and I'm not allowed to even ponder the idea of having one of my own?"

Narcissa cuffed him around the back of the head as she passed "Be quiet, you silly boy." the playful tone took any sting out of her words.

Pouting Harry headed inside, but as he did so, a thought occurred to him.

"Hey, Luna, since you brought up our attempts to gain allies abroad, have you heard anything from Su Li recently?"

"No, but she's about to." came a voice from the sitting room.

Curious, the group headed into the room and found Su Li sitting comfortably in Harry's armchair. She looked beautiful, with her long black hair, kind smile and a pair of shorts that left most of her legs exposed.

"No, you cannot have a taste of China either." said Hermione, preemptively.

"Get outta my head, woman!"

A/N: That'll do there. Short, I know, but the chapter does what it needs to. So Voldemort's moved to strike some fear into the Muggle world and failed, Harry now has seven Giants, and we've seen just how under-the-thumb he really is. And, as we've seen, I have not forgotten the sub-plot surrounding Luna, Padma, Sally-Anne, Su Li and their recruitment efforts of Magical Creatures. I just needed to find a time to bring it up again. And no, I haven't decided if this will become a harem story or not. If it does, it won't be a huge piece of

the plot. Oh, and we've finally seen Harry's mark in detail. Yes, those animals do represent those things, that's why I chose them. And twenty house-points are available for whomever can tell me where the "Hey, Ugly!" bit came from.

Anyway, until next time...

## Chapter 19: World Politics

"The Fenghuang are also known as the Chinese bird of good omen for a reason. They are not too dissimilar from the Phoenix. Unfortunately for us, all we could get from them was a promise to not join Voldemort. They are good creatures, right down to the very fabric of their being; they would never join a war movement, for either side.

"The Qilin, often erroneously referred to as the Chinese Unicorn, they are another good creature, but they will help us any way that they can. They do not kill, but will defend those who are good.

"The Shang Yung, also referred to as the Rain Bird of China, is large, blue and one-legged. The Shang Yung brings rain wherever they go, and can end droughts or cause floods as the situation calls. They won't be joining our war effort, but they won't join Voldemort either.

"The Chinese Fireball, one of the smaller Dragon species. We found where they live, but we needed a Parselmouth to speak with them."

"We also met with the Yeren, relatives of the Yeti, but had not luck in gaining them as allies, though they also agreed to not join Voldemort."

Harry gave a heavy sigh as he set down one of the photographs of the Qilin that Su's team had met in China.

"We're not really having a lot of luck with this, are we? This whole "Gain allies in the form of Magical Creatures" thing."

"We are persuading them to not join Voldemort..." began Luna.

"Yes, we are." said Harry "But at the same time, Voldemort isn't exactly looking to recruit them, is he? He has his army: Death Eaters, Vampires, Werewolves, Trolls, Giants, Dementors... We've put so much time and effort into this over the past few years, and what have we got to show for it? We did well with some of the creatures found in Britain: the Centaurs are happier, the Forest Trolls are on friendly terms with us, but that's about it. The rest are either already aligned with Voldemort, or are like the Hobgoblins: set in their ways with no chance of gaining their help. Our quests abroad have done



us no good; okay so the Satyrs of Greece are going to stay out of it and help should the war ever come to them, but apart from that..."

He heaved another heavy sigh. Hermione, Luna, Su, Lily, Sarah and Narcissa all sat around watching him.

"We've been at this for a long time, and we are no closer to making any allies than we were before we started. We've been about as successful as Dumbledore ever was in the International Confederation of Wizards. The Creatures, just like Wizards and Witches in other countries don't want to know."

He leaned back in his seat "They'll be bloody quick enough to complain should the battle spill over onto their soils though. Half the bloody Death Eaters are from abroad: Dolohov, Lestrage, Karkaroff, Rowle and that scumbag Lucius; Pureblood he might have been, but his grandfather was French. Ninety percent of Voldemort's Giants, Werewolves and Vampires come from Eastern Europe as well, including Greyback, and yet you don't see their Ministries rushing to our aid like we had to do for them when Grindelwald was making his rise to power."

Hermione frowned in confusion at that "I thought that we didn't get involved until the very end when Dumbledore defeated Grindelwald in a duel."

Sarah gave a laugh "Don't you believe it, Hermione. That's just the story Dumbledore wanted people to remember; makes his victory seem even greater. No, we were sending out Aurors and Hit Wizards long before Dumbledore finally gave in. The stubborn old git didn't want to face Grindelwald, and it was only the public outcry over how many Aurors we were losing that made him step up; he would've looked weak otherwise."

"The rest of the world's countries are the same." said Lily "We've answered calls for aid from Russia, India, China, Japan, Kenya, Egypt, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan and Merlin knows how many other countries over the past two hundred years. Muggle England has always had rocky relationships with other countries, but that's never stopped the Wizards from helping each other out. Then we get lashed by a war with Grindelwald and two wars with Voldemort, leaving us with only the corruptible and incompetent in charge, like

Fudge, Dumbledore and Malfoy, and suddenly the world doesn't want to know us."

"We might as well give up looking for overseas aid." said Harry "Handle the matter ourselves, and next time they have a problem with a Dark Wizard we'll let the bastards deal with it themselves."

"What about the Americas?" asked Hermione.

"Or Australia?" suggested Su.

Narcissa shook her head "The Wizards of South America wouldn't come to our aid. They've got their own problems, and Fudge managed to alienate the lot of them during the last World Cup Tournament that was held in Argentina."

"And as for Australia and its surrounding areas, and the U.S and Canada" said Lily "They've got their own rules."

"How do you mean?" asked Su.

"Look at the times when they were founded." said Lily "When the first European settlers got to them, the rest of the world was putting the International Statute of Secrecy in place. In Europe, Asia and Africa, each country's Minister for Magic or equivalent is required by law to keep their Muggle counterpart informed of any serious issues concerning the Magical World. In Australia and America, the Wizarding populations grew without any foreknowledge on the part of the Muggles, so they are completely under the radar, so to speak."

"Worse, though, is the way their societies work." said Narcissa "The Australians aren't so bad, but those from the U.S and Canada have a dark secret."

"What's that?" asked Hermione, who, despite her academic skills, was relatively unversed in the ways of the wizards on the other side of the Atlantic.

Lily, Narcissa and Sarah all exchanged looks before Sarah said "Well, put it this way; they don't have House Elves."

Luna frowned in confusion "But that's a good thing, isn't it? There are no House Elves working as slaves in the America."

"Yes, it is." replied Sarah "Or at least it is, until you look at what they've replaced them with."

"What?" asked Su.

"Muggleborns." answered Harry.

"When the Americas were being founded" said Lily "a lot of those moving there wanted to do so in order to practice their religion without fear of persecution, something that was causing much strife amongst the Muggles here in Europe at the time, as well as poverty; land in the New World was cheap at the time. It's nice to think then that many of the first wizards to make the move across the Atlantic were Muggleborns looking for a new life free from Pureblood persecution, but that is not what happened."

"Unfortunately during the 1660's Wizarding Europe was just coming out of a war, not unlike the one we are living through now." explained Sarah "It's part of the reason why the International Statute of Secrecy came about a few years later. Many of the Pure-Bloods who had joined the Dark Wizard of the time fled following his downfall, and found safety amongst the settlements of wizards already forming across the North American continent without the knowledge of the Muggles there. It did not take them long to bring the Wizards there under their control. The Purebloods rule supreme there, and any Muggleborns are quickly snatched up and turned into servants. They might obliterate entire communities just so no one notices that a child has been taken. The parents are not made aware of it, like they are here. The kids are taken, taught magic that we would associate with a House Elf and then spend the rest of their lives acting as such."

"That's awful." exclaimed Hermione.

"It gets worse." said Lily "In the Muggle World, the U.S and Canada have their images; the land of the free and all that. So when Muggleborns in Europe finish school and find themselves out of work because of the purebloods, they go to the U.S and Canada, thinking that they'll have a better life there. None of them realise until it is too late that the North American Wizarding societies are quite

different from their Muggle counterparts. They walk blindly into it and are quickly rounded up and bound into servitude with no chance of escape."

"People think that Muggle and Wizarding Europe could not be more different, but the difference is much worse in America." said Narcissa.

"But why doesn't anyone do anything about it?" asked Hermione.

"The same reason that they don't want to help us now." answered Harry "So long as it doesn't affect them, they don't want to know. People know it happens, but it's just easier to ignore it."

"And why would a country of pure-blood elitists want to help us get rid of Voldemort?" asked Sarah "If they were to take a side in this war, it would be his."

"And that's part of the reason for the overhaul of the Muggle Studies department at Hogwarts, Hermione" said Lily "Give the Muggleborn here a reason to stay."

The room fell silent for a long time.

Finally it was Luna who spoke "So we're giving up then? No more trying to recruit help overseas?"

Harry shook his head "No. We'll have to tell Padma and Sally-Anne when they get here, but the entire thing has been a waste of time, and will continue to be. Forget the Hobgoblins as well. If they join Voldemort then we'll just have to crush them too."

"But we need numbers Harry." said Hermione.

"I know." replied Harry "And it's doing us no good having anywhere up to thirty Wizards and Witches overseas making futile attempts to secure aid. Idiots like Fudge have already put off any who would help."

"Perhaps if we remove Fudge?" suggested Su.

Harry shook his head "No. Fudge might be a bumbling buffoon, but if he was removed then the spineless toads of the Wizengamot are

likely to be coerced into electing some Dark Lord sympathiser, and then everything will be much worse. Whilst Dumbledore's removal was necessary, we're better off with Fudge being where he is. Better the enemy you know, and all that."

"Voldemort's gaining followers all the time, Harry." said Luna "How can we hope to fight him without help?"

"Oh we'll have help alright." said Harry, looking to his mother "I think it's time some Giants were up and about, don't you?"

Lily nodded.

"And I think it's time that some of us did some grave-robbing." said Harry.

Hermione paled significantly "Oh, Harry, you can't."

"I can and will." replied Harry "But you don't have to if you don't want to. I've got another task in mind for you."

"Oh?" asked Hermione "And what might that be?"

Harry tilted his head a little to the side and asked "What do you know about golems?"

A/N 1: I'm leaving it there. I know that it is short, but this chapter has been giving me grief for three weeks. As you can see, I've pretty much abandoned my idea about recruiting Magical Creatures to the cause. That is originally where I wanted the story to go, but it have since headed off elsewhere, so I'm leaving it. I do have plans to use such a device in a future story, however. Do you have any idea how hard it is to find creatures of myth and legend from around the world? India seemed mostly to be snakes, whilst China was mostly dragons, unless you want to drag deities into things (I don't). Anyway, this chapter took a look at the politics of the Wizarding World. I have made up most of it, but much is based in the canon: Voldemort was free to recruit whatever creatures he wanted from mainland Europe, but the Ministry and Order had no help from overseas. And many of Voldemort's followers, such as the Lestranges, Malfoys and Dolohov have names from other countries. Also, Dumbledore had to step in to save Europe from Grindelwald when Grindelwald himself stayed away from England, and yet no

help (with the exception of Fleur and Madam Maxime) came from Europe in the war against Voldemort.

As to the History of the North America, I've seen many stories out there where American Wizards are supposedly better than those in Europe, embracing technology and infusing them with magic, and getting along so well with everyone. I couldn't help but wonder if that was really the truth though. Before you think it, no I don't have a problem with America, but I looked at it like this: the Pureblood supremacy thing has been going on a long time, at least since the time of Salazar Slytherin. Therefore who is going to make the move to America; Muggleborns looking for freedom (quite possibly) or Purebloods looking for somewhere where they can rule supreme without question? The discovery of America's would certainly have appealed to them, I think, especially if they had just lost a war. Anyway, that's just the way that this has gone, I doubt it'll come up again, this chapter is mostly information as to why they won't go to wizards around the world for help.

Sorry for the long Author's note; just making sure everything is clear.

A/N 2: Based on reviews, it seems that I was not clear. I think I touched a nerve with a few reviewers over in America with this chapter. Apparently it is okay for author after author to drag European Wizarding Societies (I underlined "Wizarding" because several reviewers missed that word in this chapter) through the mud, dismissing them as nothing but ignorant and archaic, but to suggest that an American Wizarding Society could have come about in the way I suggested means that I am the devil himself. Apparently it is beyond the realms of possibility that the American and Canadian Wizarding Societies sprang up hidden completely from their Muggle counterparts, and then were taken over by Dark Wizards fleeing Europe at the end of a war they lost. In fact, according to one reviewer, there is no way that a posh ponce like Malfoy would've gone to make a new life in America when it was still a fledgling country. Apparently nothing, not escape from imprisonment, not living in a hidden society, not being able to take control of that society and reign supreme, not the cheap land that drew many early European settlers, could have possibly drawn someone like Malfoy to The New World, not even following a war wherein they had lost much of their honour and prestige. Apparently taking over a fledgling Wizarding community and turning it into the society they envisioned

Britain becoming under their rule is not something that they would have wanted.

Get real people! It is entirely possible that they would have jumped at the chance, especially given the right circumstances, as I gave.

Several of you, in my opinion, made complete arses of yourselves and left reviews that showed that you clearly had not read the chapter properly. You clearly just saw "America Bad" and allowed a red mist to cloud your vision.

My argument is this: British Wizarding Society does not hold many of the same values as British Muggle Society. Why should it be any different in America, or any other country for that matter?

Oh, and to the bloke named "timber" (who doesn't sign in), by all means boycott my story because your review for Chapter 19 made you look far more ignorant than you accused me of being in your review of Chapter 14. And as we are on that subject, you were being ignorant then as well as your complaint about the word "whilst" was invalid. Yes it is an old word, synonymous with "while" that is considered pretentious and archaic - in American and Canadian English. It is still used in British English and Australian English, even though apparently the newspapers The Times and The Guardian don't like to use it. And here's a newsflash for you, pal, I live in Britain, therefore I use British English. That means I spell mum with a "u", grey with an "e", colour with the "u", exercise with an "s" not a "z" and I call you an arse with an "r" one "s" and an "e", referring to one's backside because to us "ass" refers only to a donkey... which on second thought might make that an appropriate word for you as well!

If you are going to criticise my word usage, make sure that the person writing the story is from the same area as you, as these things change from country to country.

Right, sorry to the rest of you, but I had to get that off of my chest. I usually let most negative reviews roll off my back like water off of a duck's but unfortunately one or two crop up from time to time that really piss me off and this was one of the worst of them.

## Chapter 20: New Plans.

As the many other Aurors went around rebuilding the village and a large team of Obliviators went around erasing the day's events from the minds of all the non-magical villagers, two Aurors stood scratching their heads. They were sure that the bodies of three dead Giants had been lying right behind them five minutes ago, but now they were gone. They had cast the standard magical detection spells, and there was no sign of apparition use or of portkey activation, so how had the three huge carcasses disappeared?

The answer, of course, rested with three House Elves: Dobby, Winky and Pokey. They had silently appeared on the school sports field; each grabbed a dead Giant and then disappeared with them before either of the guards could notice. Given how the majority of wizards overlooked House Elves and would never think to check for their magic, the disappearance of the three Giants would remain a mystery.

Having given the Ministry their reasons for being in the village to fight the Death Eaters: "Oliver Wood lives here and he contacted us when the attack began"; Padma and Susan rounded up the others, who had been helping to clear up, and then headed back to the manor where they were rather surprised to discover Lily Potter, Narcissa Black and Sarah Willsher on the lawns waving their wands over three dead Giants whilst a trio of House Elves ran around organising various pieces of complicated-looking rune-crafting tools. Before any of them could ask, several loud pops of apparition announced the arrival of Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, Luna Lovegood and Su Li. The quartet wandered towards the manor with seven unconscious Giants floating horizontally through the air behind them.

Hannah tilted her head to the side, a confused look on her face, and muttered "I want to ask, but I'm pretty sure that I don't want to know the answer."

This got laughter from several others.

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Tom Marvolo Riddle was sitting in the dark, contemplating furiously. Once again he had been thwarted and once again all those sent to



attack were dead. First it had been the assassination attempt on that upstart Muggleborn bint Hermione Granger, then the attack on Longbottom Manor and now this!

He got up from his black throne and made his way over to the window, stepping over the corpse of the Jasper Rookwood, the son of Augustus Rookwood, and the Death Eater unfortunate enough to be designated the duty of informing the Dark Lord of his followers' most recent failure.

The self-styled Dark Lord wrenched open the curtains and stared out of the window onto the darkening grounds. There had to be a spy; that was the only answer. Someone in his ranks was spilling their secrets to his enemies. He had been certain of this for a long time, and had at one point been sure that it was Severus Snape. Allowing him to lead in the assassination of one of Hogwarts most respected Professors had been a test, and the fact that he was captured rather than killed like the others sent with him to carry out the deed seemed to confirm the man's guilt. It explained how Granger had so easily defeated the others sent after her, and Snape had known for a long time that Voldemort had wanted to attack Longbottom Manor, which would explain how they so easily overwhelmed his forces, but the attack on the Muggle village was only a recent plan, something to rebuild morale amongst the ranks. Snape had no chance to hear of it and pass on a warning. And then there was the man's death. He had assassinated Dumbledore and tried to flee before being fatally wounded by Lily Potter. Not the actions of a spy.

Voldemort was forced to conclude that Snape had not been a spy, but someone else was. But who was it? It never entered Voldemort's mind that the reason that Hermione Granger had bested his Death Eaters was because she was better than them, but then she was just a mudblood. It also never entered his mind that the residents of Longbottom Manor had long suspected an attack against them and had taken preparations against it. In his mind it had to be a spy; in his mind his opponents never took pre-emptive action, but merely reacted (though after years of dealing with Dumbledore and the Ministry, he could be forgiven for making that assumption).

No it was definitely a spy, but who was it?

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Alastor "Mad-Eye" Moody sat at the head of the table looking out across the reformed Order of the Phoenix. Following the death of Albus Dumbledore by the hand of Severus Snape, the Dumbledore loyalists had finally come to see that the old man really had not been the all-knowing, all-powerful beacon of light that they had built him up to be and the rift in the ranks of the Order that had come about with the death of Arnold Potter had now been repaired. Now was not the time for them to be divided.

Looking around those gathered, Moody frowned "Potter, where's the missus?"

James Potter looked up from his conversation with Sirius and Remus at being addressed and answered "Erm, I believe she's visiting our daughters. Don't worry; I can fill her in later."

Moody seemed satisfied with that answer, but it was a lie. James had no clue where Lily was now that she had a job. He had rather hoped that she would show up with Minerva, Filius and Hagrid when the Hogwarts Teachers arrived, but she had not. He could only assume that she was visiting their two remaining children, but could not be sure. He'd have to keep a closer eye on her. He wasn't some kind of control freak who wouldn't let his wife do anything that he didn't approve of, but with this war going on, one could not be too careful. Going off on your own was how people got kidnapped or killed, and Lily, being a Muggleborn, was a prime target, especially when you take into account that she was the mother of the late Arnold Potter, the Boy-Who-(formerly)Lived.

Continuing that line of thought, perhaps it would be a good idea to get his daughters to move back to Potter Manor. Both had grown up and gotten safe jobs with good pay and James was immensely proud of the pair. Both of them were good with a wand and knew how to put up a fight, but even so, it's not like it's an unreasonable thing for a father to ask his offspring to return to the family manor behind its many protective wards, was it?

Moody stood "Right, I call this meeting to order. First thing's first, Minerva tells me there's a Hogsmeade weekend coming up this Saturday, any volunteers to keep watch?"

Everyone without permanent posts, such as those who guarded the Muggle Prime Minister, raised their hands, and a few minutes later, Moody had selected twenty of them.

"Right, next matter." growled Moody "As we've all seen from our recent dealings, there is now a large faction of Wizards not aligned with either the Ministry or us that is moving against the Death Eaters. They seem to be led by Neville Longbottom and they're having a lot of success. Whilst we must welcome any who stand against the Dark Wizards of our world, we must also be cautious. Without being aligned with either the Ministry or us, they are an unknown, and an unknown ally can be a dangerous thing. I know we've tried merging Longbottom's forces with ours before now and that failed because of Dumbledore acting unreasonable; giving many demands but offering little in return. So, I propose another attempt. Anyone agree?"

Nearly everyone raised their hands.

Moody gave a nod "I'll try and get a few more details for our next meeting then. Anyone else have anything to add?"

There were a few things here and there, a few giving their reports of guard duties, a mention of the clear up following the attack on Puddletown, but nothing of major importance.

"That concludes this meeting." growled Moody finally, and everyone began to get up and move about, either to leave or to make small talk in groups here and there.

Noticing James Potter moving towards the door, Ginny Weasley abandoned her seat next to her father and went to speak with him.

"James." she called out, getting the man's attention.

He turned and smiled at her "Hello Ginny. How're you holding up?"

"Okay, I guess." replied Ginny, though sounding a little unsure "Listen, I need to talk to you and Lily soon. It's kind-of important."

"Sure thing." said James "Tell you what, come by the manor later, say around seven, and we'll talk then, okay?"

Ginny nodded and gave a small smile before turning and disappearing back into the group that was the Weasley family. The rift in the Order might have been patched over, but James could clearly see that the damage to the family of red-heads was still present, with Molly and Ronald being left slightly out of things off to one side.

James shook his head sadly as he turned to leave. The Weasleys were a nice enough family but that Molly was far too controlling and demanding for her own good.

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Hermione, Luna, Padma, Su and Sally were sitting at a table in the library of the manor going over many reference books, including several thick tomes, one of which seemed to weigh as much as a small car. Padma and Sally had been disappointed that Harry was pulling the plug on their efforts to recruit creatures to help them fight, but were eager to sink their teeth into their new task; creating golems.

Simply put, golems were chunks of earth brought to life with magic with the purpose of fighting. Many ancient tomes used them to guard the treasures within. From the references that they had found so far, it seemed that it was only dirt and rock that golems could be made out of, though something that Luna had found seemed to suggest that it was possible with fire as well. The note only referred to there being heat coming off of the creation, suggesting that fire was somehow involved. Sally had been quick to suggest that the substance used in this case had been molten lava, whilst Padma had speculated that the creation might have been made of wood and then set on fire.

If either of these were the case, then there was a distinct possibility of using other elements besides rock and soil as a basis for building golems. Whilst it had been fun to spend twenty minutes speculating the possible usefulness of golems made of fire, water, air, ice, wood and tar, the simple fact was that there was no way of finding out if creating any of these was possible without first finding the methods to create the actual golems themselves.

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Astoria Greengrass stood in her room gently rocking her baby to sleep in her arms. Harry had asked a lot of her when he asked her to give birth to Draco Malfoy's son, but she had done it anyway and, thankfully, one of the potions Daphne had slipped her during her rapid pregnancy had ensured that, whilst all tests done by St. Mungo's, Gringotts and the Ministry would show him to be a Malfoy, little Nathaniel was a Greengrass though-and through. He resembled his mother in nearly every way, and no trait of Draco, be it his hair, his cold grey eyes, his evil smirk or pointed chin would ever show up.

Thank Merlin!

One thing that everyone knows is that a baby can always attract a gaggle of women, eager to coo over the new arrival to the world, and over by the door to the room such a gathering stood; Daphne, Tracey, Lavender, Parvati and Cho, or at least they had been. Lavender and Parvati had both reached the same decision with their respective spouses; no babies until after the war. The problem was this war had been going on for a bloody long time, and both women were now yearning to a little baby of their own. Ten minutes of watching Astoria with Nathaniel was enough to convince the life-long best friends to see where Seamus and Dean had gotten too.

Cho stood watching sadly. Things with Michael had been rocky for years, but recently things had begun to settle down and their relationship has seemed to be going in the right direction for them. And then he had been cruelly taken from her. Cho knew that if she ever wanted to be where Astoria was now, she would need to find a new man, but that wasn't going to be happening any time soon. Realising that there was no point brooding on the idea of children until she met someone else, she too turned to leave.

Tracey was in the same situation as Cho, but a further ahead. At school she's fallen for a Ravenclaw a year above her named Jack and they'd finally gotten together a year after she had finished Hogwarts. Unfortunately after five years together, he'd been taken from her when the Death Eaters had attacked Diagon Alley one day. Tracey had been devastated, especially because they had been due to marry just three weeks later. She hadn't found anyone else since, but was ready too. She just needed to find him, and she rather hoped that he would be amongst the group that she had gotten herself involved with. After Jack had died Daphne had been there to

pick help up the pieces and took Tracey under her watchful eye again, just like when they were at school. Back then Tracey really had needed someone to watch her back. As a half-blood, she was liable to become bottom of the pecking order within Slytherin house and indeed she was the preferred target of many of Slytherin's worst, when they couldn't find a Gryffindor or Hufflepuff that is. Daphne had taken her under her wing and provided a good deal of protection from the likes of Pansy Parkinson. The structure of the Slytherins in their year group had placed Pansy as queen bee, with Daphne as the second in command. To the rest of the school Pansy and Daphne were the best of pals, but in the privacy of the Slytherin common room, a different side of things were presented, with Daphne and Tracey being the inseparable ones, leaving Pansy with Millicent, who served as Pansy's backup muscle, much like Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle acted with Draco. Pansy had been the queen for two reasons; 1-Draco, the king, liked her; and 2 – Daphne let her be. And therein was Tracey's protection; Pansy ruled the roost because she was allowed to, not because others wanted it that way. Daphne could have quite easily have staged a coup that would have seen Pansy knocked out of the top spot quite effortlessly, probably bringing dear old Draco down too. Daphne could have quite easily taken the power amongst her Slytherin year mates for her own, but she hadn't wanted it and, so long as Pansy towed a certain line, then she wouldn't take it.

In that sense, Daphne had been the perfect Slytherin; allowing another to rule so long as she danced to her tune, at least on certain things.

Daphne herself stood watching her sister with a smile on her face. Harry's request of Astoria had been one that put her at great risk but it had paid off spectacularly, not only in that they now had Draco Malfoy's family fortune but also in that they now had Draco himself, reanimated and acting as a spy within Voldemort's ranks. The fact that Draco paid Voldemort in Leprechaun gold only served to make things that much funnier.

Daphne regretted not dragging her sister into Harry's group much sooner, but she had wanted to protect her from the harsh realities of war. In the end that had no longer been possible, and Astoria needed to learn to be able to fight if nothing else, so Daphne had signed her up.

She and Tracey on the other hand had been involved with things since a couple of months after Voldemort's return to life at the end of their fourth year as Hogwarts. By then Lily Potter had taken Harry out of the school to be trained especially and Hermione, aided by Luna, had taken over the running of things. By this point there had been three main groups amongst the students: the Dumbledore worshippers, led by Arnold Potter, the Junior Death Eaters, as led by Draco Malfoy, and the secret group known as the Undesirables, founded by the hidden-from-view Harry Potter and led by the Muggleborn bookworm extraordinaire Hermione Granger.

The name was obviously a reference to the fact that most of them were Muggleborn whilst others were the frequent targets of bullies. Tracey's low ranking in Slytherin had been noticed by them and Hermione had approached the girl with the idea of her acting as a spy to collect information on the offspring of the Death Eaters in exchange for training in battling. Tracey had happily accepted the proposal and two nights later she toddled off to the mysterious Room of Requirement, her schoolbag stuffed to the brim with notes on her darker housemates and a wand that was itching to learn some new battle tactics. Tracey had gotten away with this for a month before Daphne began to notice her semi-regular disappearances and decided to follow her. To cut a long story short, Daphne had discovered just what Tracey was up to and quickly decided that she wanted in; here was a force that wanted to fight Voldemort, but did not believe that the sun shone out of the arses of Arnold Potter and Albus Dumbledore. Who wouldn't want to join? It had certainly been a shock to learn that this group followed the brother of Arnold Potter that the world did not know existed, who was in turn being led by his mother, the supposedly charming but airheaded Lily Potter, but once Daphne knew the whole truth, she knew that she had found something that she just had to be a part of, though admittedly she had never expected to become a high-ranking member.

It had been Voldemort's attempt to recruit her to replace her parents that had made Daphne decide to include Astoria into Harry's group. Had she not, Astoria would have been next on Voldemort's list.

As she watched Astoria place little Nathaniel into his crib, Daphne absent-mindedly ran her hand over the scarring on her arm. That blasted snake would pay!

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Lily had been surprised when James' stag-shaped Patronus had appeared before her, but quickly headed off back to Potter Manor when she had realised what he had wanted.

Now Ginny Weasley, the fiancé of her dead fake son sat before her and her husband, looking more than a little uncomfortable.

"When you're ready Ginny." said Lily, in a reassuring tone.

Ginny took a deep steadying breath and spoke "O-okay. Um... There's something I... see the thing is... I need to tell you... the baby I'm carrying... it's, um, it's not Arnold's."

"What?" demanded James, standing up.

Lily grabbed him by the shoulder and forced him back into his seat. She knew this already. Given how Arnold wasn't technically alive, how could he procreate?

"How did this happen, Ginny?" she asked.

Ginny glanced warily at James's angry face before speaking "Well... the thing is, Arnold and I had been trying for years, since we left school really, to have a baby, but nothing was happening. I went to St. Mungo's to get checked and they said that I was fine. It had to be Arnold and I wanted him to get checked out, but he wouldn't. I think he was too proud. But I wanted to give him a baby so badly..."

She broke off and stared at the floor.

"So I went out into Muggle London one night, and managed to bump into someone who looked a lot like him; Daniel something. Anyway, one fertility potion and a quick shag behind a couple of bins later..."

A vein in James's forehead looked ready to burst; this little bitch had cheated on his son with some random muggle behind some bins behind a dingy nightclub!

Next to him, Lily's lips twitched in a battle with laughter. Fortunately neither James nor Ginny spotted it.



"I ought to have you arrested for attempted line theft." growled James.

Lily reached out to put a calming hand on his shoulder "James, she won't have been the first witch in recent years to have done something like this. After so many generations of inbreeding, many families are struggling to produce children."

"But my family did not inbreed!" snapped James.

"I know." said Lily "But your family has married into the Black family several times over, and look at how many kids their latest generation produced. This was probably inherited from the blacks and just happened to crop up in Arnold, that's all." Inside Lily was congratulating herself on being able to lie so fluently.

James sat fuming for a few more moments before finally nodding his head in acceptance "I suppose so. But what now?"

"There is a potion that we can use." said Lily "Something Andromeda mentioned once," (it had been Narcissa, but Andromeda looked less suspicious) "you add some things from the father, drink it and then it changes the unborn baby's genetic makeup to match. There will be no trace of the bloke who provided the ... ahem seed, so to speak."

"Just one problem there." said James "Arnold is dead."

"Then you'll have to do, won't you?" asked Lily.

James immediately began spluttering in indignation.

Lily smirked and sent her would-be daughter-in-law a wink.

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Lord Voldemort's thought process was cut off when a Death Eater who was so low ranking that he had never bothered to learn the man's name entered the room nervously.

"What is it?" hissed Voldemort angrily.

"M-my Lord." the man stammered "My son sent me a letter saying that there will be a Hogsmeade weekend for the students of Hogwarts this Saturday. Perhaps we could-" he broke off, but Voldemort understood what the man was getting at.

Yes, an attack on Hogsmeade when the students were in town. There would be Aurors present, of course, as well as a few teachers and Order members, but they would be few and far between, and anyway, taking them out would serve him well.

"You have done well to bring me this news, my loyal servant." said Voldemort "Inform your son to keep himself and his friends away from Hogsmeade this Saturday. I'd hate an innocent pureblood to get caught in the crossfire."

"Thank you, my Lord." said the man, bowing himself out "Thank you."

A/N: So how was that? Finally a bit more background on a couple of key characters, and I've brought Ginny, James and the Order into things a bit more. Hope you enjoyed it.

## Chapter 21: The Battle of Hogsmeade.

Lord Voldemort stood before his army of followers, gazing out over them all; his eyes filled with contempt.

"In the past two months, you have failed me repeatedly." he announced "This ends today!"

His followers shifted anxiously; there was every chance that one or more of them was about to be cursed.

"Today," Voldemort continued "we will make the world remember why they should fear us. Today we will make the world realise why they should bow to us. Today we will attack Hogsmeade village and kill every single Auror and Order member that we come across. We will torture and kill any student and resident that refuses to bow to us. Today we will send the Wizarding World a message that it will never forget!"

Many of the Death Eaters felt a sickening chill rise within them; many of their own children would be in Hogsmeade today. Why had they not had warning of this?

Was this what it felt like to be a mudblood?

None noticed Draco Malfoy breaking off from the crowd as they left Voldemort's throne room.

Lily Potter begrudgingly made her way into McGonagall's office. Why the Board of Governors had decided to have a meeting with all school staff on today of all days was a complete mystery. The teachers needed to be out in the village, assisting the Aurors and the Order in watching over their young charges, not having pointless conversations with self-important old duffers who really had no idea how a school was run.

The answer lay with one of the Governors, Titus Buckweed. After allowing everyone else to enter the room before him, he quickly pulled back his sleeve and touched his Dark Mark with his wand, signalling to his lord and master that the teachers were out of the way.

Voldemort stood on top of the hill overlooking the village. Behind him was a large part of his army; Death Eaters and what remained of his Dementors. He had decided to leave the Giants and Werewolves out of this one.

Below them the raucous shouts and laughter of the students of Hogwarts filled the air as they went around ducking in and out of shops; Dervish and Banges which sold magical trinkets, Dogweed and Deathcap which stocked Herbology supplies, Gladrags Wizardwear which sold clothes, the Hogsmeade Post Office, Honeydukes sweet shop, Zonko's joke shop, Tomes and Scrolls the book shop, Scrivenshaft's quill shop and The Three Broomsticks, where the students could get a refreshing butterbeer or two.

The very idea of it made Voldemort feel sick to his stomach.

He raised an arm and announced "Begin."

The Dementors soared off first.

Harry Potter stood on top of the steps that led to his manor house. Across the grounds before him, his own gang of Undesirables were about to face off in a mock battle against Neville's group, the Defence Association. Everyone was in position, and Harry raised his wand, ready to fire off the red sparks that would signal the start of battle when a small burst of flame appeared before him. When the flame disappeared, there was a small piece of parchment left floating in the air. Harry snatched it up and read.

The Dark Lord moves to Attack Hogsmeade today!

The students of Hogsmeade were enjoying their day away from the school; they were free to wander in and out of the shops, see the sights, visit the Post Office and go for a drink in the Three Broomsticks, all under the watchful gaze of several Aurors, and a good number of Order members. For an early November morning, it was unusually warm, but that was about to change.

Auror and Order member Nymphadora Tonks was watching a trio of Hufflepuff fourth year girls as they left Gladrags when a sudden icy chill filled the air. Tonks was quick to draw her wand, not too far away, Order members Dedalus Diggle and Sturgis Podmore and

Auror Jeremiah Savage mirrored her actions. The trio of girls had frozen in place. Tonks caught their attention.

"Get back inside and stay down." she hissed. The girls all nodded and headed back inside wizardwear store.

Savage raised his left hand to his mouth and spoke into a tiny communication crystal "All units, prepare for battle. Dementor presence detected."

And suddenly they were there, a swarming shroud of black sweeping up the road from the lower end of the High Street. Students who had been loitering around the entrance to Dervish and Banges were already screaming, running in blind panic from the soul-sucking terrors. Other students were quick to dart down the two side streets, one leading to Madam Puddifoot's, the other to the Hogs Head inn, whilst others dove into Scrivenshaft's, Gladrags and Zonko's and still more began running up the street, hoping to escape back to the school

The group of four defenders all aimed their wands and fired off their patronuses. Three shapeless spheres of silvery light were joined by Tonks' fully corporeal patronus, which seemed to be a round creature with many arms, in shooting towards the oncoming terrors. The Dementors broke ranks as they passed by the patronuses, seeming to fear Tonks' the most, before swarming forth. One of the students, a boy in Ravenclaw robes, tripped and fell and two Dementors moved in to feast.

Savage began yelling into the communication crystal "All units, move to the High Street. We've got at least eighty Dementors here, and we cannot hold them."

The Dementors reached them, Tonks pulled her patronus with them, and it came to stand with her, protecting her. One of the Dementors descended upon Sturgis and wasted no time in sucking out his soul. Tonks didn't see him fall; the swarming Dementors quickly blocked him and the other two from sight. Unable to do anything else, Tonks pushed her way forward and found the Ravenclaw boy. He wasn't dead, but badly traumatised. Forcing the Dementors to back away, Tonks grabbed the boy by the back of his robes and lifted him up. The sheer number of Dementors began to force her back, and she began a retreat down the side street that led to the Hogs Head inn.

Still maintaining her patronus, Tonks made her retreat, dragging the unconscious student with her.

Behind her the door to the Hogs Head banged open and the owner, Aberforth Dumbledore stepped out. On seeing the situation, he drew his wand, and moments later his patronus, a goat, charged into the Dementors that were following Tonks.

Together the pair heaved the boy inside. Then they put a last powerful burst of magic into their patronuses, pushing the Dementors as far back as they could and they headed inside, slamming and sealing the door shut.

As they did so, plumes of black smoke soared overhead, signalling the arrival of the Death Eaters. While some shot spells into the fleeing masses, others burst into flame and began crashing through the roofs of various shops and homes. Two of them aimed for the Hogs Head, but met grizzly ends as they exploded against the extensive wards that protected the place.

Their attack might have failed against the wards, but the whole building shook with the force of the impact, causing dust to fall from the rafters. Tonks looked around and saw that a good two dozen students were held within, as well as a few other patrons.

"How long will the wards hold?" she asked.

"Provided the bastards don't have any high-powered curse-breakers among 'em," replied Aberforth "long enough."

Tonks nodded, swallowing nervously "I need to contact the school, the teachers will need to provide help, and the Ministry too."

"Righ', you get on that." grunted Aberforth "There's a fireplace over there. I got a way to get this lot to safety." he gestured to the students.

Tonks hurried over to the fireplace, grabbed a pinch of floo powder from the pot on the mantle and threw it into the fire with a shout of "British Ministry, Auror Office!"

"You lot!" growled Aberforth to his regular, seedier looking customers "Do somethin' useful for once in your lives and guard this place. You kids, with me. I've got a way for you to get back up to your school."

Outside, twenty Order members and fifteen Aurors were quickly proving to be far from enough, even with a few sixth and seventh year students and Hogsmeade residents providing backup spell-fire.

The Death Eaters continued to rampage whilst the Dementors swarmed around in a soul-sucking frenzy.

"Aurors!" Tonks yelled into the room containing fifty of her co-workers.

Amelia Bones and Rufus Scrimgeour pushed their way forwards "What's happened?" asked Amelia, sounding grave.

"You-Know-Who's attacking Hogsmeade." replied Tonks frantically "There're Death Eaters and Dementors everywhere, we don't stand a chance."

"Is your position secure?" asked Scrimgeour.

"Yes, I'm in the Hogs Head." answered Tonks.

Scrimgeour turned to the others "Well? You heard her, armour up and get to the Hogs Head."

"And be quick about it." barked Amelia. She turned to Scrimgeour "I'll go alert the hit-wizards. If someone could alert St. Mungo's...?" Scrimgeour nodded and the pair hurried off.

As the Aurors began hurriedly milling about to get ready, Tonks drew her head back from the fireplace, threw in another pinch of floor powder and called out "The Headmistress' Office, Hogwarts."

Outside, something strange was happening in the sky above the battle. Clouds were turning a strange purple colour, and quickly began to form the shape of an owl, with its wings outstretched. From the tip of each feather on the ends of the wings plumes of purple mist flew out, quickly spiralling towards the ground, raining spells down on the Death Eaters.

Suddenly there were innumerable patronuses were swarming in amongst the Dementors, not only repelling them, but also destroying them. Killing curses, stunning spells, reductor curses, body-bind curses, slashing curses, cutting curses, gouging spells, explosion hexes and severing charms began to rain down upon the Marauding Death Eaters. The tide quickly began to turn.

"Professor McGonagall!" yelled Tonks. All eyes in the room turned to her "Death Eater and Dementors are attacking Hogsmeade!"

"Thank you Tonks." said McGonagall as Tonks vanished "All of you, grab your wands."

As the teachers ran from the room, the Governors were left behind. Not wanting to be involved, they all fled through the floo. Titus Buckweed was the last to leave. He sent a message to his master through his Dark Mark, and then disappeared through the floo. His job for the day was done.

Aberforth came back downstairs as many Aurors began to fill his pub.

Scrimgeour was quick to take charge of the situation "Aberforth, you and your patrons stay here; we may need to bring the wounded here. Aurors, stun any Death Eater that you come across, and be ready to throw out a patronus at a moment's notice.

Receiving nods all around, Scrimgeour led the Aurors outside, to find the Death Eaters being forced into a rapid retreat. The Aurors wasted no time in locking them into a pincer movement.

Up on top of the hill overlooking the village, Voldemort stood with what remained of his best fighters; Bellatrix, Dolohov, Macnair, Mulciber, Yaxley and Crouch Jr. From here they could survey the battle, and join in when needed.

As two new forces turned up to take on the Death Eaters, Yaxley turned to Voldemort.

"My Lord?"



Voldemort gave a nod, and the six Death Eaters standing with him turned to smoke and soared away to join the battle.

The large serpent slithered up behind Voldemort and coiled itself by his side.

"Soon, Nagini." Voldemort soothed "We will join the battle soon."

As the teachers hurried across the school grounds, unable to apparate due to the wards, a group of about fifteen students were racing up the long path that led to the school.

"I can see it!" shouted one "We're nearly there."

Their excitement was short lived, however, as a swirling mass of black smoke raced after them. A sickly green killing curse flew at the students, hitting the ground in front of the first one and sending an explosion of dirt into their faces. They all dropped to the ground in fright, covering the backs of their heads.

Peter Pettigrew landed. He was going to enjoy this. He pointed his wand at a pretty young girl and cried out "Crucio!" Her screams filled the air and went through her friends like knives.

Five Dementors swarmed up the path and moved in to feast.

The staff of Hogwarts burst through the front gates and down the path. They raised their wands when a collection of purple plumes blocked their view.

Peter Pettigrew's torture curse ended when Harry Potter's Reductor curse blew his spine apart. He slumped over as the patronuses of Hermione Granger, Padma Patil, Daphne Greengrass, Neville Longbottom, Hannah Abbott and Seamus Finnigan shot at the Dementors, slamming into them and destroying them.

The teachers all froze, with the exception of Lily, who ran up to her son.

"How did you find out?" she asked.

"Draco." answered Harry "He couldn't give us previous warning because Voldemort didn't announce it until half an hour before things began."

Lily nodded and looked around the group "Where are Luna, Sally-Anne and Su?"

Hermione smirked "We couldn't bring our Giants, but Luna had an idea."

At that moment, near Madam Puddifoot's tea shop, Luna, Sally-Anne and Su Li led a few others into battle, and behind them came a group of the few creatures that they had successfully gained an alliance with: Forest Trolls. Ten feet tall, with pale green skin, these muscle-bound brutes came wielding massive, heavy clubs which they wasted no time in using to flatten as many Death Eaters as they could get to.

As the teachers began getting the group of students to their feet, the sounds of apparition signalled the arrival of the remaining Order members, led by Alastor Moody.

James took one look at Harry before letting out a raging "What the hell...?"

Lily winced, knowing that the cover was finally blown "I'll explain later, James."

"No, you'll bloody well explain now!"

"James calm down."

"I will not calm..."

Harry gave a hiss of pain. Hermione's eyes were on him instantly.

"Harry? What is it? What's wrong?"

"He's here." growled Harry "Voldemort's here... somewhere."

All eyes turned to the burning village in the distance.

"Harry?" Lily spoke softly. She reached out to put a hand on his shoulder, but he was gone. He turned into a plume of purple cloud and sped off towards the village. Hermione, Neville and the others wasted no time in following him.

Lily blew out a heavy sigh and then followed. So did the rest.

Harry arrived in the middle of what remained of the Three Broomsticks and immediately dispatched of Marcus Flint and Graham Pritchard. Others arrived around him and began hurling spells into the Death Eater ranks.

One Death Eater took one look at Harry and disappeared immediately, reappearing a second later at his master's side.

"My Lord," he cried frantically "Potter! Arnold Potter! I just saw him!"

Voldemort's red eyes narrowed and he mercilessly forced his way into the low-ranking minion's mind to see the memory for himself. It only took a second to find and, sure enough, there was Arnold Potter, tearing through his forces like Black Bear through a beehive. Voldemort left his follower's mind and turned to face the burning village once again, not noticing the man slump over, his brain warped from the force of the attack.

So Arnold Potter was still alive, was he? That ought to be impossible, but then again, Voldemort himself was no stranger to returning to life after a long time thought dead. No matter, he would destroy the little brat this time, once and for all.

"Nagini, come."

The large snake slid up her master's body to throw a coil around his shoulders, and then he disappeared.

With the number of Death Eaters before them dropping by the second, and with the Dementors all but gone, the remaining members of the Order and Teachers began either apparating the injured to St. Mungo's or creating port keys to get them up to the school's Hospital Wing, where Madam Pomfrey and Professor Slughorn waited to provide medical aid.

Harry was currently locked in a duel with Yaxley and was quickly wearing his opponent down. Scrimgeour was putting up a valiant fight against Dolohov, until some unknown Death Eater got him in the side with a killing curse. The scumbag's victory was short lived, however, as Amelia's cutting curse removed the man's head easily before she turned to pick up the fight with Dolohov. No one was quite sure when she had arrived in battle.

Hermione and Padma were helping an injured girl out of the rubble that once was Honeydukes when a killing curse missed the three of them by mere inches. Hermione turned to return fire and found herself face to face with "The Psycho Bitch from Hell", otherwise known as Bellatrix Lestrange.

"Oh, is da big bad widdle mudblood gonna fight? You won't hurt poor widdle Bella, would you?" Bellatrix cackled madly after her taunting insult, but Hermione wasn't about to be intimidated. She threw a high powered bludgeoning spell at her head, and Bellatrix only just managed to block it and scowled at her opponent. The pair began circling as Padma finished pulling the injured schoolgirl out of the rubble and passed her off to Auror Williamson to take to St. Mungo's.

Selwyn gave a grunt as his back impacted the wall of what was once a quaint little cottage. He had been forced back there by Neville Longbottom and Hannah Abbott. Hannah was bleeding from a wound on her side, but she had got him back by disarming him. The husband and wife duo raised their wands and ended the miserable sod's life with a bombardment hex each to the skull.

Bellatrix was quickly finding herself outnumbered, as now Luna, Padma and Tracey had joined Hermione in fighting her, but she refused to back down. She threw a piercing hex at Hermione, who dodged it easily, and, in one fluid movement, she swung her arm out and from the tip of her wand she sent a fire-whip which slashed through the air and cut Bellatrix's wand hand clean off. Bellatrix threw herself to the side to dodge the series of spells that Luna, Padma and Tracey then sent her way. She went into a roll and came up standing with a wand in her remaining hand. Apparently there were some Death Eaters who were not quite so arrogant as to believe that they had no need of a second wand. Quick as a flash Bellatrix used this wand to create a silver hand for herself where the old one had been.

Hermione swung the whip again, but this time Bellatrix caught it with her silver hand. A pulse of magic shot along the length of the whip and shattered Hermione's wand, and doing some serious damage to her hand as well.

"An eye for an eye, don't you think?" cackled Bellatrix in glee, but once again this nearly cost her, this time in the form of a cutting curse from Tracey. Bellatrix was quickly forced back on the defensive, as the Hermione had now been replaced by Lavender, Cho, Parvati and Su, each one of them joining Luna, Padma and Tracey in firing a powerful barrage of deadly spells at Bellatrix, whose shield charm would not hold up for too long under the repeated blows. Bellatrix was powerful, but she now faced a host of powerful foes.

Behind them Sally-Anne had a firm hold on the arm of Hermione's injured hand, healing it. It took all of two seconds and then Hermione was once again ready for action. She drew her spare wand and she and Sally-Anne joined in the rapid fire attack on Bellatrix.

Yaxley fell with a scream at Harry's hands. Unconcerned with the geyser of blood erupting from the body of his opponent, Harry looked around. His first instinct was to help Hermione and the others with Bellatrix, but he knew that they could handle her. Perhaps he should join the fight against Dolohov, but Amelia, Susan and a coupled of others had him surrounded.

Mulciber, Crouch, Macnair and Avery were also surrounded, and it was only a matter of time before they fell. No other Death Eaters were standing, and there were no Dementors left. Perhaps he ought to just help end the fights going on around him.

He took a step forward to approach the battle with Macnair when the hair on the back of his neck suddenly stood on end.

He had come.

Harry spun and quickly ducked beneath the huge snake that lunged at him. A quick banishing charm as he did so sent it flying and he stood to face his nemesis.

Several people around them screamed at the sight of Lord Voldemort himself amongst them, but Harry held his ground.

"You'll not live this time, Arnold Potter." Voldemort snarled, holding up his wand "I'll make sure of it. Avada Kedavra!"

Harry did not duck under the spell. Nor did he dodge to the side of it, even though he was perfectly capable. Instead he gave made a slashing motion with the wand in his hand and, to the surprise of everyone watching, Harry caught the killing curse on the tip of his wand. Voldemort's eyes widened in surprise and no small amount of fear.

"Tut, tut, Thomas." said Harry in a mock reproving tone of voice "You really shouldn't play with spells like these. You might hurt someone."

Voldemort gave a primal roar of rage and lunged forward as if intending to physically attack Harry. Harry made another slashing motion with his wand and threw the killing curse back at Voldemort, who avoided it simply by apparating away.

Harry drew his old Holly and Phoenix feather wand as he turned and brought it up just in time to counter Voldemort's next strike.

"Avada Kedavra!"

"Expelliarmus!"

The two wands locked together in combat, neither able to best the other in combat, but that did not stop Voldemort from putting as much force into it as he could. Harry, meanwhile, was content just to hold Voldemort in place. Allowing the Dark Lord to tire himself out would only serve Harry in the long run. Just so long as that blasted snake didn't take a chunk out of him first. Normally Harry would have drawn the Elder Wand to put a hole through the snake's head, but Voldemort would probably break the connection off if he realised that Harry had two wands.

With a final spell to the gut, Mulciber dropped dead and the group that had been facing him, Daphne, Wayne, Ernie and Seamus all turned to find more foes. Whilst the boys went to join the fights against Crouch, Macnair and Avery respectively, Daphne briefly

considered joining the fight against Bellatrix, as it seemed to be a battle for the women, but then she noticed something out of the corner of her eye.

The snake.

She fired the darkest cutting curse she knew and watched its path with satisfaction. Her aim was true and the foul creature's head was carved clean off of the rest of its body, which thrashed violently with a few death spasms before flopping limply to the ground.

Voldemort saw this, and he broke off the connection with Harry's wand, intent of firing off a killing curse at Daphne. The green beam of light that was the curse sped towards her, but collided with a red coloured beam that slammed into its side and the two wands locked again. Voldemort glared at Harry who smirked back. Deciding to get the girl later, Voldemort instead focused all his attention on overpowering Harry's wand.

Padma's spell was the one that tore down Bellatrix's shield, Luna's spell destroyed her wand, and Hermione's spell killed her. The psychotic bitch was thrown through the air to crash through the window of a small house, which must have been the last window in the whole village to break.

Voldemort saw this too, but could do nothing. He had to overpower Potter's spell, then he could kill the brat and claim his revenge for Nagini and Bella.

Leaving the Teachers, the Aurors and the Order to find the rest of the injured and get them to safety, the rest of the Undesirables and the Defence Association not still locked in combat surrounded Harry and Voldemort, not prepared to let the Dark Lord escape should he choose to flee.

Nearby Avery fell with a pitiful moan of agony, but Crouch, Macnair and Dolohov fought on, well, not exactly fought, they were hiding behind their shields, not daring to flee their master's side.

Hermione could see Harry begin to glow. Voldemort hadn't realised it, but the spell Harry had used to re-lock their wands wasn't a disarming spell like he used the first time. Instead it was a power-sapper spell, designed to drain an opponent of their magical

strength. The problem was this magical strength was being channelled into Harry, and he could only take so much. The faint orange glow that was beginning to surround Harry showed that he was taking on too much. If it stayed in him too long it would begin to hurt, and if he absorbed too much, there was a very real chance that Harry would die.

Hermione rolled back the sleeve on her arm, exposing her mark and placed her wand tip against it.

"Ad spinam." she intoned. The spell meant "I drain." and that was literally what she wanted to do.

The glow around Harry seemed to dim a little, but it didn't go away, and Hermione felt a rush of magical power sweep through her, making her tingle all over.

Luna drew her wand too and pressed it against her mark "Ad spinam."

Daphne, Padma, Sally-Anne and Tracey did the same, and a few moments later the rest did too, with Neville's group pressing their wands to the new marks that they had all received just after the fight against the Giants.

Voldemort could feel his magic draining, but forced himself to keep going, draining power from this last living Death Eaters. This was to be the undoing of many of them. Feeling the drain on their power, Dolohov, Macnair and Crouch all decided to flee before they were killed. Around the village, the more seriously injured Death Eaters lost their remaining strength and died quickly. The rest became weaker and weaker by the second.

Voldemort felt weak, weaker than he had felt in a long time. He sank down to one knee as his brow became drenched in sweat. Harry saw this and knew that now was the time to strike. Keeping the Holly and Phoenix feather wand trained on Voldemort, he re-drew the Elder Wand with his left hand and aimed.

"Avada Kedavra."

His aim was true, and the green spell slammed with full force into Voldemort's chest. The power that Harry had drained from



Voldemort served to overpower the spell, and the Dark Lord was thrown through the air to crash to the ground some distance away.

Voldemort's body began to crumble and fall apart, but as some people began to cheer, Harry's eyes, and the eyes of those closest to him, never left the rapidly disintegrating corpse. A swirl of black fog rose up and swooped towards Harry, its red eyes gleaming and its mouth open to emit a terrible scream. Harry swiped with the Elder Wand and a white pulse left it and travelled through the wraith form of Voldemort like an electric shock. The terrible visage turned and fled.

Battle done, Harry slumped over, but Hermione caught him.

"You did it." she whispered comfortingly into his ear "You beat him."

Harry drew several deep, shaking breaths before answering "For now."

"Harry?" asked Luna's voice. Harry and Hermione turned to see Luna standing over the still breathing body of a Death Eater. Daphne, Padma, Neville and others were positioned in the same way.

"What about the survivors?"

Harry looked at the battered and bleeding form that lay prone before Luna. His face took on a sneer that was usually only achieved by those of Snape or Malfoy blood.

"There are none." he answered.

Luna gave a nod and pointed her wand at the injured bastard before her "Avada Kedavra."

All around her those bearing Harry's mark did the same.

In a dark corner two streets over, the wraith of Lord Voldemort found the stunned body of Theodore Nott, the son of one of his long-time inner circle members lost in battle in recent weeks. A fine host.

Hermione was just about to apparate Harry home so he could get some rest when she realised this many wands from Order members and Aurors were pointed at her, or rather, they were pointed at Harry.

"Um, Harry?"

Groggily Harry opened his eyes and raised his head from where it laid gently on Hermione's shoulder, and he took in the scene before him.

He mustered up the strength to frown.

"Ah, hell! Did you people ever hear of the phrase "thank you"?"

Lily pushed her way through the group, wrenching James and Sirius' wands from them as she went.

"Knock it off, you lot. He needs to rest. Hermione take him home."

Hermione did not need telling twice and a heartbeat later, she and Harry were gone.

Both of Mad-Eye's eyes fixed themselves on Lily.

"Mind tellin' us what's going on, Missy?"

Lily scowled at him, but then noticed all the faces staring at her; Mad-Eye, James, Sirius, Remus, Kingsley, Tonks, Minerva, Emmeline, Hagrid, Amelia and many more.

"Oh, hell" indeed.

A/N: So what do you think? Voldemort's forces have been decimated and his body destroyed. This story is far from over; as Voldemort now possesses Nott in much the same way he did Quirrell, he still has a few Giants, Werewolves and other nasties to call on, and Dolohov, Macnair and Crouch are still out there somewhere. I'm uploading this chapter without much of a proof-read, but give me a break, its five-minutes to midnight where I am, and I was up at six this morning. I'll check it tomorrow.

## Chapter 22: The Final Horcrux

Lily Potter was sitting on one side of Professor McGonagall's desk inside the headmistress' office in Hogwarts. To either side of her sat Sarah Willsher, Serena Lovegood, Hestia Jones and Narcissa Black.

Opposite them, representing the Ministry of Magic were Amelia Bones, Cornelius Fudge, Tiberius Ogden and Augusta Longbottom, and, representing the Order of the Phoenix were Alastor Moody, James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin and Minerva McGonagall. All of them were staring open-mouthed at what they had just been told.

Arnold Potter, the Arnold Potter, the one they had all watched grow up, the one that many of them had trained, was not real. He was never real. Instead he was the end result of some paranoia and some pretty shady spell work on Lily Potter's part.

It was a lot to take in. It sounded like the product of the over-active imagination of a daydreamer with a little too much free time on his hands... and access to a computer and a website where people encouraged him to continue with this kind of thing.

James was the first to recover, and his accusatory words were aimed at his wife. "How could you?"

Lily's eyes narrowed in anger. She leaned forward and snarled "Look me in the eyes and tell me I was wrong to do it. Look me in the eyes and deny that you and Albus raised Arnold in exactly the same way I feared you would raise Harry."

Silence reigned again. It was true, no matter how much they all didn't want to admit it. Lily Potter had been afraid that, if given the chance, James Potter and Albus Dumbledore would mould Harry into a little snot-rag with delusions of grandeur that believed himself to be unbeatable. And that was exactly how they had raised Arnold.

"You could have told me." said James, finally.

"Could I?" asked Lily "When was the last time you ever wanted to talk things through with me?"

James had no answer.

"Look," Lily continued "the fact of the matter is what's done is done, there's no undoing it. And you would do well to remember the fact that Harry has just done more good in this war in the past two months than the entire Ministry and Order put together has done since the war began."

Several people tried to protest that, but Lily shouted over them "In the past two months, Voldemort has lost all bar three of his best warriors. His hold over the Werewolves is weaker than ever, he's lost ten of his Giants and all of his Dementors. His snake is dead and he's been forced from his body, and that buys us a respite. What we need to do now it wheedle out every Death Eater and sympathiser still lurking within the Ministry. We need to locate Dolohov, Crouch and Macnair and bring them down. And we need to find Voldemort. If he's still in his wraith state, we need to find a way to lock him in that form so that he can do no harm. If he has a body we need to destroy it. And somewhere along the line we need to find out how to destroy him permanently." Her expression and her voice then softened "But before any of that, we probably should regroup and count our losses from today."

Finally there was something that they could all agree on. After receiving nods all around, Lily stood to leave. Sarah linked her arm through Lily's and the pair left together.

The sight left a horrible taste in James' mouth, but what was there that he could do about it? Lily loved Sarah, and not him. That had been one of the many things that came out during the meeting.

Sirius nudged him "You alright?"

James took a deep sigh, and then shook his head "I always thought that she had come around, you know? That she just started to like me once my parents took her in. I never thought that it was through lack of choice. Looking back, I suppose her change of heart was rather sudden. But why didn't she tell me about the contract sooner?"

Sirius just shook his head "She probably thought that you already knew mate. It was your mum and dad that signed the contract, after all. It's a bit odd that they didn't tell you about it though, isn't it?"

James nodded "Yeah it is. And with Dumbledore signing on Lily's behalf..." he broke off, his eyes widening slightly.

Looking around, he saw that Sirius and Remus appeared to have arrived at the same conclusion. "You don't think..." he began.

"Nah." Sirius cut him off, though he didn't sound too sure.

"It's possible." murmured Remus, thoughtfully "You're family were not known for utilising marriage contracts, were they?"

"Not for the past two hundred years." answered James.

"Then I'm afraid that there is a distinct possibility that they were not acting of their own volition." concluded Remus.

The three men had wandered from McGonagall's office as they were talking and were now entering a disused classroom on the floor below. After shutting the door behind them, Remus threw up some privacy wards as James wondered aloud "But why though? What would he have to gain by it?"

"Access to any kids you might have?" suggested Sirius.

"But again, why?" asked James "The prophecy didn't even exist back then."

"Well, Lily is a very intelligent witch." observed Remus "And she's also Muggleborn, and you know where so many of them go... or used to."

"So this could all have been about controlling Lily, you think?" asked Sirius.

"It is possible." replied Remus "After all; I think we've just had a pretty good wakeup call as to how in control Dumbledore liked to be. McGonagall mentioned that when Dumbledore found out about Harry he immediately set about trying to gain control of him. We used to poke fun at Slughorn about his wanting his reputation bolstered by the rich, famous and the well connected. Dumbledore was the same, just not as transparent and a little more manipulative about it."

"True, I suppose." said Sirius "And let's face it, Lily is a rarity; highly talented in charms, runes and potions. You can see why Dumbledore would want her on board, whether she was willing or not."

James gave a heavy sigh "If that old bastard wasn't dead, I'd kill him myself."

There were a few moments of silence before James spoke again "What do we do now?"

"We work together and help Harry in any way we can." answered Remus.

Sirius nodded "Like it or not, Lily did the right thing in keeping him out of Dumbledore's grasp. It's on Harry now."

James nodded sombrely.

Antonin Dolohov, Walden Macnair and Barty Crouch Jr were standing in the dining hall of Nott Manor when the door to the room slammed open and Theodore Nott walked in.

Backwards.

With Voldemort's face growing out of the back of his head.

The three Death Eaters stared in shock.

Nervously Macnair issued a stuttered "M-my Lord?"

Suddenly Theodore's arm sprung up as Voldemort screamed "Avada Kedavra."

Macnair winced, fearing the end, but all that happened was the tip of the wand crackled a bit with green sparks.

Furious, Voldemort used Theodore's body to march over to the high-backed chair that sat at the head of the table and sat down. Finding himself facing the back of the chair, Voldemort quickly realised that this was not going to work, so got up, turned and knelt on the chair. He now looked ridiculous, but at least he could see his three remaining followers.

"It would appear" he began "that Arnold Potter was once again able to throw me from my body."

The three Death Eaters said nothing. They didn't dare look at each other.

"We must lay low for a while and regroup. Macnair, you will contact Buckweed and tell him to keep his head down and then you will go to all contacts within the Ministry and tell them the same. Crouch, you will go and inform the Werewolves, Giants and Vampires that they are to return to the continent until we need them again. You will, of course, provide each of them with port keys to get them there. Dolohov, I want you to head to the continent as well. Contact your family there and enlist them. Then contact anyone else you can; Lestranges, Malfoys, Rowles, all of them. Understood?"

The three men nodded and hurried away. Once they were gone, Voldemort settled Nott's body properly into the seat.

One thought raced through his mind: Now what?

Lily, Sarah, Serena, Hestia and Narcissa all left Hogwarts immediately following the meeting. Once beyond the wards they disappeared, reappearing moments later inside the manor. It was mostly empty, with the majority of the group still assisting with the clear up in Hogsmeade. Hannah and a few of the other women were back, making up emergency beds. Narcissa and Hestia moved off to join them.

Lily led the other two upstairs, where they found Hermione exiting Harry's bedroom.

"How is he?" asked Lily.

"He'll be fine." replied Hermione "He's sleeping now."

"And where's Luna?"

"She's still in Hogsmeade, why?"

"Can you get her? We need to get that thing out of Harry's head now."

Hermione rolled back her sleeve and poked her mark with her wand. Moments later Luna had arrived. Together they entered Harry's room.

"Why the sudden rush?" asked Luna once she'd been told what Lily wanted to do.

"We should have done it a long time ago." replied Lily "I was so worried about the risks involved that I've put it off for far too long. If we're lucky, Voldemort won't be strong enough to take possession of a body yet and this will finish him."

"And if he has inhabited a body?" asked Hermione.

"Then he will definitely die when that body is killed." replied Serena.

"We might even get lucky and he'll try to switch hosts." said Sarah "Should he try that he'll die without anyone being in harm's way."

Suddenly Lily let out an exasperated yell "Damn it. The potion. We don't even have the potion ready."

Sarah grabbed her by the shoulders "Lily, listen to me. Harry is going to be fine, okay? Now take a deep breath." Lily did so. "That's it. Now, let's go brew that potion, okay?"

Lily nodded and the three older women left, leaving Hermione and Luna alone with a sleeping Harry. Both exchanged looks before getting into the bed with him.

With a swish and flick, Dean levitated another hunk of rubble out of the way, allowing Neville and Seamus to get in for a closer look. Immediately they spotted a hand sticking out of a heap of dust and broken bricks. Both men swallowed against the bile that rose in their throats and Neville grabbed it to feel for a pulse. He felt one, though only faintly, and there was a moan from somewhere beneath the rubble. His eyes widened and he turned to shout "I've got a live one!"

Instantly Rose, Romilda, Colin and Williamson joined them and together they began moving the stone to find the person trapped beneath.



They found two people. The hand belonged to a boy in about his sixth year. He had his body wrapped around a young girl who was probably just a third year. The boy was unconscious and they could not awaken him. The girl had awoken half as they began to dig the boy out. Quickly she explained that the boy was her older brother. When the building had collapsed he had grabbed her and used his body to shield her.

Rose and Romilda apparated the pair to the Manor as the girl pleaded with them to find her friend.

They searched in earnest and eventually found another girl just a few feet from them. Somehow, miraculously she was alive too. And so were the two fourth year boys they found a few feet towards the back of what had once been Honeydukes.

Five people found alive. It made a nice change for the rescuers. For the past two hours it had been one dead body after another.

Elsewhere in the village, Aberforth stomped his way over to help Tonks and Parvati get a battered and bruised Madam Rosmerta from what remained of the Three Broomsticks. She was alive too, which was more than could be said for a few of her patrons, one of them being a third year on his first trip into Hogsmeade.

Not too far away, Padma, Sally-Anne and Su Li were overseeing the removal of the Death Eater bodies from the scene. Luna had been helping them, but had since answered a call from Hermione.

Luna's last act before leaving was to get the Forest Trolls to form a protective line in order to prevent the reporters getting in. If these people were only there to take pictures then they could bloody well wait. Things were bad enough without the reporters getting in the way.

It took three days for Lily to brew the potion for the ritual; as such Padma, Sally-Anne and Su were in the room to watch. Daphne was in the room too, Lily had roped her into helping her brew the potion the moment Daphne had come back from Hogsmeade. She had wanted another expert potions maker on hand to make doubly sure that everything went right. Neither Daphne nor any of the others could hide their fears for the safety of Harry, Hermione and Luna.

Harry had touched each of them in a big way, and now he was their leader, their captain, their king and, more importantly, their friend. And to him they were his confidants, his friends, his allies and, in his eyes at least, his equals, not his subordinates.

Many now looked to him for guidance, and it was they who helped him give it.

Harry had roped Hermione, Luna, Padma, Su and Sally-Anne together when they were all young and the bonds of friendship that they had forged were amongst the strongest to be found anywhere and together they had pushed each other to become better and stronger. Thanks to Harry two mudbloods, two foreigners and one oddball were allowed to grow and blossom in a way that would normally not occur in their world. And thanks to Harry a pure-blood princess was allowed to escape the shadows of her Death Eater parents and become one of the best and most respectable potions mistresses in the world. Without him it was quite likely that she would have died long ago at the hands of Voldemort himself.

Together they had shown others what they could be. They had shown how to not allow society to hold them back. And that they were able to do so was all down to Harry bringing them all together.

So of course they were all worried for Harry now. This ritual to remove the piece of Voldemort's soul that resided in Harry's scar was a risky move, but it was also the only viable option available.

Harry had since awakened from his ordeal in Hogsmeade and now, as Lily's shaking hand handed him the pewter flagon containing the potion, his eyes met each of theirs. His message was clear. If this failed, Harry, Hermione and Luna would pay with their lives. If that happened, it was up to Padma, Su, Sally-Anne and Daphne to take up the reigns and lead their group to seeing the war through to its end.

Harry brought the flagon to his lips and drank a large gulp. Pulling a face of disgust at the taste, he handed the flagon to Hermione, who drank the same amount. Trying not to vomit she passed the flagon to Luna, who drank her share and, groaning in disgust, she handed the flagon back to Lily.

Lily took the flagon as Sarah handed Harry a silver dagger. With this he made a cut into the palm of each hand. Hermione then took the dagger from him and cut into her left palm before handing the dagger to Luna who made a cut on her right palm. Sarah took the dagger back and the trio exchanged look.

Harry laid out on his bed, lying flat on his back. Hermione and Luna laid out of either side of him, both of them resting on their front. Harry took a deep breath and muttered "Here goes."

He held out both of his hands, palm up. Hermione and Luna exchanged one final look with each other before each grasped one of Harry's hands, palms facing so that their cuts pressed against his.

And then all hell broke loose.

A/N: That's it for this chapter. I know that some of you were expecting to actually see Lily's explanation, but really there's no reason for her to share any more than she did with Neville's group in Chapter 15. Any further information will be revealed on an as-and-when basis. As mentioned above, one reviewer did mention that Lily said that all the Horcruxes had been destroyed. They had, with the exception of the snake (at the time) and Harry's scar. Lily saw no reason to tell Neville and his group about that as they knew how to get rid of it. In other news, the new Hobbit trailer is out. As a non-Twilight fan I was wondering just what film series I could get my kicks from now that Harry Potter is over, and a trip back to Middle Earth will be just the thing for me. I can't wait!

I have no idea why but when I uploaded this, all the formatting went to pieces and it all came out as one huge block of text. I've done my best to make it look right, but if there's anywhere that it seems wrong let me know.

## Chapter 23: Love is the Key

Hannah finished running her diagnostic charms over her patient and decided to give him one last dose of soothing solution before declaring him completely free from the after effects of the torture curse.

She made her way over to the trolley on which a large collection of potions sat. Tracey made her way over too, looking for a pepper-up potion. With a pop, Dobby appeared, his arms filled with more bottles and phials of potions.

Suddenly an enormous pulse of magic tore through the room, throwing everyone and everything away from the door and towards the end of the room with the window. Each bed lurched horribly, crashing into the ones next to them, crushing the bedside tables and buckling the privacy screens that had been set up. Hannah, Tracey and Dobby were sent hurtling into the potions trolley, and they, along with it, crashed to the floor, every bottle smashing, the contents going everywhere.

The same thing occurred in every room in the place, with everyone and everything being violently thrown to the side by a pulse of magic. Those closest to the epicentre were knocked unconscious by the force.

"What the hell was that?" groaned Tracey as she tried to stand, but it was a wasted effort.

The entire manor house was now shaking so violently you'd have thought it was being hit by an earthquake measuring at least nine and a half on the Richter scale. Only the strength of the magic protecting the building preventing it from coming crashing down on those within.

People were finding themselves unable to move. They wanted to go and find out what was happening, but instead they had to just grab onto whatever they could and hope that it would end soon.

Up in the master bedroom, Padma was the first to wake. She and the others had been blasted away from the bed by the powerful pulse of magic and against the wall at the end of the room. Every inch of her body ached like hell and one look at the face of Daphne,

who was next to wake up, told her that the potions expert was in much the same state.

The terrible vibrations that rocked the building did little to soothe her aching body, and the loud rumbling sound made her headache ten times worse.

And the bright light coming from the bed did not help.

The idea behind the ritual was a simple one. The one thing that Voldemort had no understanding of was love. It was the power and strength of love that had thrown him from his body when he attacked Harry as a baby. So it was love that would be used to rid Harry of the part of Voldemort's soul that resided in his scar.

The ritual itself was as ancient as it was unique. There were many rituals throughout the world that could be used to bind people to others, but this was the only one where the bonds were centred on love, the rest being based on slavery.

The ritual brought people together in ways that one's wedding vows could only pretend. The bonds formed by the ritual were eternal, unbreakable, everlasting. And therein lay the risk. If there was even an ounce of doubt in either Hermione or Luna's minds as to how they felt for Harry, or he for them, then their very souls would tear apart and they would cease to exist.

But this was the only way to remove the piece of Voldemort's soul from Harry's scar. If successful the bonds would rid all parties involved of anything that could endanger their future together, and the Horcrux was exactly that. There were only four other ways to rid Harry of his scar, and basilisk venom, fiendfire, killing curse and Dementor all pretty much guaranteed Harry's death. The ritual was the only option that offered the chance of life.

Both Hermione and Luna had to be bonded to Harry in this way because if Harry was only bound to one, his love for the other would be broken. Harry, Hermione and Luna were three, that is that way it has been for a long time, and none of them were prepared to let even this ritual tear them apart. If the ritual succeeded, then they would remain together, bound to each other forever more. If it failed, then they would die together, and remain at each other's sides' even in death.

Either way the fragment of Voldemort's soul would be destroyed, that much was guaranteed, and that was what they wanted, all that was left for anyone else to do was to hope and pray that the trio did manage to pull through alive.

The Spiny Serpent was located in Knockturn Alley. To the ignorant, it appeared to be a shop. To those in the know, however, it was a gentleman's club, with access available only to a specific clientele. A frequent haunt of Dark Wizards, its regulars included Death Eaters and run-of-the-mill scumbags alike. Here a Death Eater could enjoy a post-muggle-slaughter drink, as petty crooks got hammered and argued over the spoils of day's dirty deeds. And if they were to cough up enough gold/swag, then they could head on upstairs to where the real appeal of the place could be found; a collection of thirty six muggle females aged any, though mostly between eight and twenty five, each confined to their own room, each ready for anyone paying enough to do with as they pleased.

It was to The Spiny Serpent that the black-robed man made his way. To the average bloke in the street, the front door always appeared locked, and few people ever bothered trying to gain access. There were, of course, ways to access the place; muttered passwords being the most common. But this man had what could be called "an access all areas" pass, so to speak. He rolled back his sleeve and slammed his dark mark against the door, which clicked and swung inwards.

The man stepped inside and the door swung shut silently behind him. All conversation within the place went silent, well except for at the large table at the far end of the room. The mob surrounding it remained as riotous as ever.

The Death Eater lowered his hood to reveal his face. He cast his eyes around the room, taking in his surroundings. In the corner nearest him, opposite the door, sat the infamous Silas Borgin, owner of Borgin and Burke's, talking with two other proprietors of shops in Knockturn Alley; Marcellus Moribund, owner of Moribund's Wands, and Aileen Frapt, the witch who owned the beard trimming place.

At the bar sat a pair of scruff bags who had clearly fallen on hard times. More than likely they were victims of the pro-mudblood feelings that had been growing rapidly in recent years. These two

looked like they hadn't been out of school for more than five years. Like many purebloods, they probably spent their time sauntering around the place as if they owned it, and refused to study or pay attention in class, believing that they were guaranteed well-paying jobs no matter how poorly they did at school. And now school was over, and they were in a changed world from the one their fathers ruled. Nowadays job applicants were expected to offer proof that they could do the job; people were employed based on what they know, rather than who they know. These two poor sods stood no chance, and were more than likely thrown from their families in disgrace for not obtaining high-ranking and well paying positions in society.

Across from the bar, at a table meant for four, lay a pitiful sight. A large, fat, bald, red-faced man was slumped over the table, his head buried in his arms. Three shot glasses stood around him, one half filled with a bottle of amber liquid, and a fourth lying on its side. A bottle of fire whiskey with enough in the bottom for one more shot glass sat on the table as well.

And, again, at the far end of the room was the large table where at least fifteen wizards dressed in ragged and worn clothing laughed and shouted as they drank and brawled.

It was because of those men that the Death Eater was here.

He made his way over to the bar and looked at the barman and owner of the place; a large, bald man with a thick brown walrus moustache.

"What kin I get yer?" asked the man in a gruff voice.

"Three bottles of fire whiskey, Mr Vial." the Death Eater answered "And I'll have them down there with that lot." he nodded his head in the direction of the fifteen scumbags at the opposite end of the room.

The barman nodded and began milling about for the three bottles and enough shot-glasses to go around.

The Death Eater pushed himself away from the bar and, ignoring the three shop owners in the corner, the two scruff bags at the bar and the drunk at his table, he made his way over to the gang at the other end of the room.

His eyes locked onto the man who he knew to be the leader of the group. The man was facing away from him, but there was no mistaking him. Riotous scumbag he may be, but he alone had the stature of a man who usually called the shots.

Standing behind the man, he asked loudly "Got room for one more?"

The man didn't even turn to look, instead shouted "Ah, piss of."

The group's boisterous behaviour stopped instantly when an axe slammed into the table, missing the lead man's finger's by a hair's width.

Leaning in the Death Eater growled "I'll not ask you again, Scabior."

The man called Scabior turned his head to get a better look at the man standing behind him and his eyes widened with recognition.

"Mr Macnair!" he exclaimed "Why dincha say it was you. Come on lads, shove up, shove up. Give our guest somewhere to sit."

The four men to Scabior's left all moved along in their seats to make room. Macnair took the offered seat as the barman reached over to place the bottles of fire whiskey and shot glasses.

"Gents," said Macnair, holding out his arms "A gift from me to you."

"Thanks very much, Mr Macnair." said Scabior as he handed out shot glasses. The man to his right began filling them up, and of course they remembered to pour one for their guest as well.

"So, Mr Macnair," began Scabior one his drink was in his hand "What brings a fine and upstanding gentleman such as yourself over to our lowly table in this here establishment?"

Macnair cast a look around to see that no one was listening in on their conversation. Seeing that they were not, he leaned in and said "My Master has need of your services."

Scabior nearly choked on his drink, and he wasn't the only one.



Running his hand over his mouth, Scabior cast a look around the room before asking in a low voice "What's an all-powerful sorcerer want with the likes of us?"

"Man power." replied Macnair "As you may well know we've suffered a few losses in recent weeks. The Dark Lord is keen to make up our numbers and he's asked me to find out if any of you want in. If you accept you will, of course, need to prove your worth and once you do you will be welcomed into the ranks of the mighty organisation of the Death Eaters."

"Prove ourselves how?" asked another of the men.

Macnair gave a little shrug "Rape, torture, murder. I'm sure that you're no strangers to that."

All the men exchanged identical, vindictive grins.

Inside the manor the tremors had finally stopped. As everyone else began hurriedly putting everything right, Neville and Hannah ran upstairs to see what the hell had happened. Hestia and Narcissa were quick to join them.

They forced their way through the door to the master bedroom and froze at the sight that greeted them.

Harry, Hermione and Luna were curled around each other on the bed, an ethereal glow surrounding them. Lily, Serena and Sarah were standing over them, waving their wands in intricate patterns. Padma, Sally-Anne, Su and Daphne were standing at the foot of the bed, clutching each other with tears streaming out of their eyes.

"What's going on?" asked Neville.

Before anyone could answer a loud scream filled the room. A trail of blood began to ooze from the lightning-bolt shaped scar on Harry's forehead and moments later a vile-looking green mist leaked from it. The screaming seemed to be coming from it, and it continued for about a minute. Then the screaming ended and the mist dissolved into nothing.

The glow around the trio on the bed faded, and all tension seemed to leave their bodies.

Lily and the others continued to wave their wands over the trio for about half a minute more.

Then Lily lowered her wand.

"Voldemort's final anchor is no more, and they're going to be okay." she announced.

All three bottles of fire whiskey had been finished off, and Macnair and Scabior finally had an agreement knocked together.

"I can getcha loads of 'elp from overseas, Mr Macnair." Scabior announced "Doncha worry about that."

Macnair gave a nod and stood "See that you do."

And with that, he turned and left. For once he had good news for his master.

Outside the pub, he nearly tripped over something big. Looking down he was that it was the man who had been slumped over a table on his own when he had arrived. It seemed that the man had made the decision to go home but had passed out before getting there.

With a snort of disgust, Macnair marched off into the night.

The door to The Spiny Serpent opened again and Scabior led his group out, all of them laughing boisterously and shouting loudly.

"Oi, what this 'un lads." announced Scabior, pointing out the drunk.

Still laughing and now hurling insults at the man for not being to take his booze, the group made their way past him. The group moved halfway along the street before the one at the back turned to the man nearest him and sat "Hey, I just realised; that bloke 'ad a lovely watch on 'im. I'm gonna go pinch it while 'e's still outta it."

The other man just nodded and followed on behind the rest of the group. The one who remained turned and hurried back to the drunk. He knelt and pulled the man's sleeve up a little to better access the gold watch. Just had his drunken fingers were fumbling for the clasp,

however, the drunk's other hand suddenly shot up and grabbed him by the wrist with a loud

"Gotcha!"

The would-be thief tried to free himself, but a moment later the drunken wizard disappeared, taking the thief with him.

Amelia Bones was walking through the Auror office, intending to head home for the day when suddenly two men appeared before her. She, along with Kingsley, Dawlish and Williamson, as well as quite a few others, immediately drew their wands on the pair. However, before they could cast anything, one of the men, the fat bald one, began to lose weight rapidly and grow spikey pink hair.

"You're gonna love this, boss." declared Nymphadora Tonks with a grin.

A/N: And I think that that's enough right there. Let me know what you think. I do hope you enjoyed Scabior's arrival on the scene.

I'm still getting many comments on the whole America thing that I did. There are many of you who have noted that you liked the direction I took it and I thank you. However there are still those who assume that just because Muggle America formed one way that it is therefore impossible for Wizarding America to form differently. Oh well. One reviewer though did bring up the question of "What [am I] going to do about it?" Well Harry and co. have done all that they can for now. They have changed people's attitudes and so more and more Muggleborns are staying in England instead of going to America and getting enslaved. Harry's first priority is what is going on in England right now, and that means combating Voldemort's forces. Following that, should the good guys win, there is the rebuild. As far as I can tell there are three ways in which a country will change its ways: 1) Internal forces, such as new leaders who enforce change, 2) Pressure from other Nations, 3) Hostile takeover. The first is unlikely to happen, the second is even less likely (because the ICW doesn't do anything ever) and the third is something that Harry really is not in the best of positions to do.

Grounds for a sequel? Perhaps, though unlikely as I have other projects that I want to work on.

## Chapter 24: The Merging of the Light

Hermione sat watching as Harry talked animatedly with Neville, Dean, Seamus, Wayne and Stephen. It was nice to see Harry in male company for a change. True, he had been friends with Wayne and Stephan for a long time, since their schooldays in fact, but it was becoming a rarity to see him actually seeking the company of his own gender. Not that that was really his fault, Hermione herself, along with Luna, liked to take up as much of his free time as possible. And then, of course, there were the others; Padma, Sally-Anne, Su and Daphne. Somehow along the way they had become the ones he placed most of his trust in, so it was only natural that he sought them out for company.

Thinking of Harry brought a soft, warm smile to Hermione's face as she absentmindedly ran her fingers over the wedding ring on her ring finger. Both she and Luna were now married to Harry. The ritual to remove the piece of Voldemort's soul from Harry's scar had caused Hermione and Luna to bond with Harry on such a level that the very essences of their being were now merged. In the eyes of the magical world, Harry, Hermione and Luna were now married to each other.

In response to this, Harry had taken his two brides out into Muggle London where they perused the displays of many a jewellery store until both had settled on one engagement ring each, and one wedding ring each.

It was the happiest moment of Hermione's life when Harry placed that ring onto her finger. Of course, Harry being Harry, he had promised that once the war was over, they would have a proper wedding, one which her parents could attend.

Hermione could not wait for the day when it was safe for her parents to come back from Australia.

The sofa that she was sitting on sank a little lower, and Hermione turned to see that she had been joined by Hannah.

The blonde woman smiled at her, before nodding towards the talking men and saying "I see that they've become fast friends."

"Yes," answered Hermione with a nod "That's the thing about Harry. He'll remain reticent of new people until he learns he can trust them. Once that happens, you'll have a friend for life."

She then frowned slightly "But betray that trust, and you'll never get it back."

Hannah nodded "Like that Blaise Zabini, you mean?"

Hermione turned to Hannah with a wide-eyed look.

"I heard a few murmurings about him; how he had once been a part of the group, but had betrayed them by handing information over to Voldemort." the blonde continued.

Hermione nodded "He had been passing on names to the Death Eaters." she explained, turning her gaze away from Hannah "The Death Eaters failed to get us, but more than a few of us lost family members because of him. Tracey's mum, for example, both of Stephen's parents, Jimmy's sister and mother, Sally-Anne's father and grandparents. We managed to get my parents out when the Death Eaters attacked them, but their home was destroyed. So were many other houses on that street, and other Muggles with them."

"What happened to Blaise?" asked Hannah.

"Dead." was Hermione's blunt reply.

Silence reigned for a few moments, and then Hannah spoke up again.

"If you don't mind my asking, how is it that you, Harry and Luna became... well, as you are?"

"A trio, you mean?" asked Hermione.

"In a sense." replied Hannah "I already know that you were joined at the hip at school, but how did that become..."

"More?" suggested Hermione.

"Yes."

Hermione shrugged "It just happened that way."

Hannah gave her a disbelieving look.

"Honestly, it did." said Hermione "We'd been together for so long, Harry was attracted to the both of us, and both of us to him, we knew that. But it was too hard to stop being a trio, we tried. It was too hard for two of us to be together, leaving the third one out. It just didn't work for us that way."

"So you just decided to share?" asked Hannah.

"In a manner of speaking." said Hermione.

Hannah grinned and shook her head.

Opposite from them, Harry stood up and announced "It's time."

Alastor Moody stepped forward and eyed his surroundings suspiciously; his magical, electric-blue eye swirling around madly as it took in every last detail of the area. Satisfied that they were not about to be ambushed, he turned and fixed both of his eyes on the group that had arrived with him.

James Potter, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, Arthur Weasley, William Weasley, Minerva McGonagall, Elphias Doge, Emmeline Black (nee Vance) and Aberforth Dumbledore had been selected by Moody personally to accompany him in representing the Order of the Phoenix during a meeting with Harry Potter, the True-Boy-Who-Lived, and leader of the organisation known as The Undesirables.

"Alright, listen up." Moody barked, making sure that he had their complete and undivided attention "Today is an important day for us. Some of us may not like to admit it, but the people that we are about to meet literally saved our collective asses during the Battle of Hogsmeade three weeks ago. Without their timely intervention it is highly likely that we would have been quickly overrun and the death-count would have been far greater. It is also highly possible that Voldemort would now be sitting in Hogwarts having conquered the place with little effort on his part."

Oh yeah, he could say the name.

"But remember, they are still an unknown. We share a common purpose; to rid the world of the Dark Lord, that much is true but what they ultimately stand for, what their true goals are remains a mystery and so to that end I want each and every single one of you to remain on your guard, are we clear?"

"Yes." was the unanimous response.

"Right," growled Moody "Let's go."

The instructions given to them by Lily Potter had said to head north from the apparition point, so they headed north.

Elsewhere another company was heading southward. Made up mostly by Aurors, this group was three times the size of the group representing The Order. In the centre of the group, protected from attack somewhat by a human shield were some of the most important (and self-important) figures of the British Ministry, including the Minister for Magic Cornelius Fudge, his recently promoted Senior Undersecretary Percy Weasley, Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot Tiberius Ogden and Chancellor of the Wizengamot Augusta Longbottom, to name but a few.

Heading up the group were Amelia Bones, head of the DMLE, Gawain Robards, the new Head Auror following Scrimgeour's death in Hogsmeade and Pius Thicknesse, the head of the Magical Law Enforcement Patrol. The Aurors with them included Nymphadora Tonks, Kingsley Shacklebolt, John Dawlish, Jacob Proudfoot and Gerald Williamson, amongst many others.

Two other Aurors, Susan Bones and Hestia Jones were to meet them at their intended destination, as they were heavily involved in the group that they were about to meet.

Both groups made their way in the directions that they were told, eventually leaving any paths behind altogether. Eventually the trees gave way to a stop, facing each other. Moody and Amelia both eyed each other with suspicion, both thinking the same thing;

Now what?

As if in answer to their question, Lily Potter emerged from nowhere. She took the time to smirk at those in both groups who had jumped.

"A ward line." she explained "Harry takes the protection of his home and those within it most seriously. As such I feel I must warn you of two things; first, if you act with violence, you will be met with violence. Second, if any of you possess the Dark Mark of Lord Voldemort, this ward line will automatically rob you of your life. Are we clear?"

"Please, Lily," said Fudge pushing his way forward "I assure you that no one here has any intention of acting in a violent manner, and none of us carry the Dark Mark."

Lily scowled at the man. He was being entirely too familiar for her tastes. The man was probably hoping to get Harry to be his poster boy for his next Ministerial campaign.

With a small nod of her head she replied "Very well, Minister, if you're sure."

She turned and gave a wave of her wand. The scene changed as the wards altered themselves to allow those standing outside to see in. Though all they could see was a large hedge stretching off both to the north and to the south.

Lily led the way forward and the rest followed. They made it about ten steps before the sound of a man's gasp caused all of them to turn to Thicknesse. The man was clutching his chest as black ripples of magic coiled themselves around his body. He was standing right where the ward line was.

His legs gave out, and he collapsed in a crumpled heap.

Several members of the Order and the Aurors kept their wands trained on him as Lily stepped forward. She grabbed the man's arm and pulled his sleeve back to reveal the skull and serpent mark of Voldemort.

"Still sure, Minister?" Lily asked, sending the man a dirty look.

Fudge responded with an impression of a gaping fish.



Lily shook her head, and continued on up towards the manor house. The rest followed, each one seeming a bit more cautious now, and none dared to touch the fallen man.

At the doors they were joined by a group of twenty others, all dressed in dark robes. The newcomers formed two lines; nine on the left and nine on the right. With Lily in front, and the last two at the back, the Order members and Ministry officials found themselves being herded through the house. None of them were particularly comfortable with it.

They came to a marble staircase, not unlike the one at Hogwarts, which led up to the next floor. Lily led them right by it, instead heading along another corridor. At the end there was a large black door. A wave of Lily's wand had the door opening, revealing a stairway that went down into an inky blackness.

No torches lit their way now, and the guests had to be extra careful in minding their step. Their escorts seemed unfazed by the darkness that surrounded them. Moody quickly found that even his magical eye could not see through the unlit atmosphere.

The stairs seemed to go on downwards for a long time. The guests wondered at just how far below the manor house they had gone. They had not made a turn, either, so there was even the possibility that they were not longer even beneath the house.

Finally they came to another door, which Lily opened. The room beyond it was lit in an eerie blue glow. Lily and the others led the guests inside. Indicating a group of uncomfortable looking chairs, Lily instructed them to sit before heading back out through the door. Her companions followed.

Feeling uneasy, the Order members and Ministry officials all eyed each other wearily before slowly making their way to the chairs. Each of them cautiously took a seat.

The blue glow came from five flaming torches hanging on the wall behind them, each ball of blue fire flickering occasionally. The flames provided very little light, and each person could tell that the room obviously extended beyond the glow of the flames. Only one person could see beyond the reach of the fire-light, and Alastor Moody was unsure as to what to make about what he could see.

As the last Auror took his seat, the flames behind them turned from blue to orange, and a good thirty more lit up around the large room. The guests took in the sight before them. Their seats filled scarcely a quarter of the room. Three of the four walls had benches that increased in level lined against them. Directly opposite the guests, the benches rose highest.

The layout was not unlike Courtroom Ten at the Ministry of Magic, though this room could easily hold far more people on those benches than the two hundred that could be seated in Courtroom Ten. This had an immediate effect on the guests, who suddenly got the rather curious feeling that they were about to be put on trial.

High up on the opposite side of the room, situated behind the topmost bench, there was a door. Slowly it opened.

One by one, a line of wizards and witches filed through the door and moved down to take seated positions at various points along the benches. Each one was dressed in black robes, except the last few to enter: Susan Bones, Ernie Macmillan, Dean Thomas, Parvati Patil, Seamus Finnegan, Lavender Brown, Cho Chang, Padma Patil, Sally-Anne Perks, Su Li, Daphne Greengrass, Neville Longbottom, Hannah Abbott, Luna Lovegood, Hermione Granger and lastly, the one they were all here to see, Harry Potter. He and the others were dressed in robes of dark blue, giving the impression of higher rank.

Harry, it should be noted, did not approve of himself or the others looking as though they were more important than the rest, but Hermione had insisted that it gave them an air of authority that would make their guests feel just that little more intimidated than a sea of black.

Looking at the group of faces looking up at them, Harry saw that there was no denying it; Hermione was right. The Wizards and Witches of the Ministry and the Order looked uncomfortable. That was what he wanted; these bumbling and ineffective people had had their chance at fighting this war and it had gone on for far too long. As far as Harry was concerned, it was now a case of "My way, or the highway."

James was unsure what to feel as his eyes settled on the face of his only son for the first time that he could remember. Harry looked so

much like Arnold had, and yet so different. In terms of facial features, there seemed to be no difference, but the way Harry held himself was the complete opposite of Arnold. Whereas Arnold would project an aura of cocky arrogance, displaying a belief that he was invincible, that he could not be touched, every drop of the atmosphere that Harry seemed to project around himself positively screamed "I'm in charge here."

And it was quite clear that he was. Everyone who had entered before him at taken their seats and were now waiting for him to begin.

But he said nothing. Instead he just sat there, staring at them all, taking in the faces of each and every Ministry official and Order member seated before him. They, for their part, stared right back, some in awe, some with respect, some with indifference, some with indignity, and some with boredom. The only possible exception was Moody. His normal eye was fixed on Harry like everybody else's, but his magical eye spun around wildly, whirling this way and that as it took in every person seated before them.

Finally, after several long and silent minutes, Harry spoke. His voice caused even Moody's magical eye to lock on to him.

"You had a traitor in your midst." he stated, obviously referring to Pius Thickenesse "Do you make a habit of employing Death Eaters and their sympathisers?"

Instantly Cornelius Fudge turned a shade of puce that signalled an imminent explosion of anger. They did not have to wait long for it.

"Now see here!" he blustered, making a young Auror sitting in front of him cringe as he felt droplets of spittle drench the back of his neck.

"No, you see here." Harry responded in a calm tone "The Ministry of Magic has been fighting this war against Voldemort for almost two decades, and fought an eleven year war with him thirteen years before this one began. That people who wear Voldemort's brand are still able to wander freely among you, are still able to hold down jobs in high ranking positions is, quite frankly, deplorable. How long had Thickenesse been in charge of the Magical Law Enforcement Patrol?"

He looked to Amelia Bones for the answer.

"Sixteen years." she answered after a few moments.

Harry gave a slow nod "I see. And what did he do before that?"

"Twenty five years as an active Law Enforcer." answered Amelia.

"Long enough to have been a spy for Voldemort in that department during the last war, then." concluded Harry "You tell the world that the Ministry is dealing with the war effort, and yet it takes my wards to finally flush out a spy of near forty years."

No one answered him.

"What did he do, Cornelius?" asked Harry "Cry imperius like Malfoy and Nott? Did he get someone to vouch for him, like Snape did with Dumbledore? Did he exchange secrets for freedom like Karkaroff? Or did he completely slip under your radar, like Macnair and so many others?"

The Minister's blood pressure was really becoming something of an issue.

Harry eyed the man with a look of pure distain before asking "Can any of you offer anything in the way of information that might see this war won?"

Tonks turned to look at Amelia. The more senior witch gave her a quick nod, and Tonks stood up to speak.

"A few days ago I was operating under cover in Knockturn Alley. I observed the Death Eater Macnair recruiting a bunch of people to You-Know-Who's cause. They were a rough lot; the kinds we frequently have to bring in for thievery and muggle-baiting. They were led by a man called Scabior."

"Did you apprehend any of them?" asked Harry.

"Just the one." answered Tonks "There was one of me and many of them. I managed to catch a straggler. We drained him for information."

"And?" asked Harry.

Again Tonks looked to Amelia, and again the older witch nodded.

"Macnair not only recruited them, but persuaded Scabior to round up a few associated he has in other countries. The man also gave us the locations of several of the group's safe houses, but when we raided them they were empty. We think Scabior crossed the channel into France early the next morning, though from there the trail goes cold."

"And let me guess, the French are reluctant to help?" stated Harry.

Tonks shook her head "They think that so long as they keep their heads down, the war won't come to them. They refuse to provide assistance, and were reluctant to let our own Aurors inside their borders to search. The Delacour family have put a bit of pressure on their political friends to try and get them to yield, but-

"But they're dealing with politicians." Harry finished for her "If they ever change their minds, by then it will be too late and Scabior will be on his way back to Britain with several dozen French hell raisers."

Tonks nodded before resuming her seat.

"Fortunately for us, our intelligence gathering has proved far more worthwhile than yours. Our spy has handed over a list of names of those within not only the Ministry but also society at large who either actively fight for Voldemort or at the very least finance him."

A wave of his wand sent a roll of parchment consisting of a list of names collected by Draco Malfoy towards Amelia.

"Here is how this is going to work." said Harry "The Ministry is going to conduct a purge on itself. The Order, accompanied by some of my forces which will be led by Neville, will raid Knockturn Alley. I don't care if you have to flatten the place, you will get rid of that evil place once and for all. The rest of my forces and I will set about getting everything in place to flatten Lord Voldemort and his remaining forces once and for all."

"And if we don't feel like taking commands from the likes of you?" asked Moody with a growl.

"Then consider your efforts in this war over." replied Harry "The Ministry of Magic and the Order of the Phoenix have had nearly four and a half decades, almost half a century to end this war with Voldemort. Both have failed to complete that task. We are in charge now, and if you cannot follow your orders, then you will kindly leave it to those who can."

A/N: Another chapter done, yay! Almost two weeks into the New Year and this is the first update; I'm so appalled at myself. How were your holidays? My Christmas was quiet and my New Year's Eve down the pub was, well, okay... I guess, but at least we remembered the big count down this year. Last year down there no one noticed until someone shouted "Sh\*t, its three minutes past twelve!" Fun times.

I'm not sure how much of this story there is left, but we are drawing to its close soon.

## Chapter 25: Taking the War to the Enemy

Another fire place flared with green flames as yet another Ministry employee arrived. Immediately he was grabbed by the two Aurors guarding the fire place. His wand was taken from him and then he was escorted by one of the Aurors down to a holding cell, his protests ignored.

For the fiftieth time that morning, Amelia Bones' voice echoed throughout the halls and offices of the Ministry of Magic.

"All employees will submit to questioning about suspected Death Eater activity. Any persons who resist face imprisonment in Azkaban. This is in line with Ministerial Decree Number 76."

Across the Atrium, another man, Jeremiah Redford, wrenched his arm free and made a run back towards the fire place in which he had arrived. Ten stunning spells slammed into him before he could make it. He crashed into the wall and slumped down it, coming to rest in a crumpled head on the floor.

The Auror whose grasp he broke marched over to him and pulled back the sleeve on his arm, exposing a Dark Mark for all to see.

Azkaban had just gained its thirteenth new prisoner of the morning.

"How's it coming?" asked Harry as he entered the room.

"Nearly there." Lily replied "We've done the work on most of them; we just need to finish the spells on about fifty more and then activate them."

Harry nodded and looked across the dark-robed bodies laid out around the large room. Voldemort's own followers were soon going to be fighting against him.

Harry walked through the room, looking at the bodies on which all the spell work had been completed; Bellatrix, Wormtail, Mulciber, Selwyn and at least three hundred others would soon awaken and march into battle against the forces of the Dark Lord.

Harry came to a stop at the end of the room, looking down on the bodies of two men.

Seeing Severus Snape and Albus Dumbledore alive and fighting once again would certainly mess with Voldemort's head.

Voldemort gave a wave of his wand and the potion in the bowl vanished. Instantly he knew that something was wrong. He reached in, snatched up the locket and opened it. A small square piece of parchment fell out. Voldemort opened it up and read;

To the Dark Lord,

I know I will be dead long before you read this but I want you to know that it was I who discovered your secret. I have stolen the real Horcrux and intend to destroy it as soon as I can. I face death in the hope that when you meet your match you will be mortal once more."

R.A.B

Rage burned through the Dark Lord. He had not felt this furious in a long time. Someone knew about his Horcruxes. One of his own Death Eaters had betrayed him and stolen this Horcrux in an attempt to destroy it. Voldemort knew the initials, and also knew that Regulus Arcturus Black was dead. So where was the real Horcrux? Did anyone else know of them?

He had no way of knowing that Lily Potter had discovered the locket during a trip to the Black family house at Grimmauld Place some years ago and deduced what it was. He also had no way of knowing that she, along with a few others, had found the rest.

Shaking with a rage, Voldemort contemplated his options. There was no way he could risk entering Hogwarts to check on the Diadem. He no longer had access to the Lestrangle family Vault at Gringotts, so he could not check on the Cup of Hufflepuff. He knew that the Diary had been destroyed, due to that fool Lucius Malfoy's incompetence. Nagini had been killed by the Greengrass bitch. And now the locket was missing.

That left the ring.

He would have to travel to the Gaunt shack outside Little Hangleton to check on it, but first;



"Corpus excitare."

The incantation, and the accompanying wave of his wand, resulted in a pulsating white glow shooting across the surface of the water. The stagnant water began to bubble and broil and bodies beneath began to move about.

Casting his gaze to the opposite shore, Voldemort could make out the first of five thousand Inferi dragging itself out of the water.

He needed numbers, on his side, and there was no sense in leaving so many reanimated corpses on guard duty here in this cave if there was nothing here for them to guard.

Hermione eyed the mechanical monstrosity before her with a curious expression on her face "Are you sure that this will work?"

Stephen shrugged his shoulders "Worked well enough for the warring factions of the Middle Ages."

"So long as the projectile does not weigh more than the counterweight, then there should be no problems." added Wayne "What about you, Hermione? Are you sure your little piece of wand work will function correctly?"

"Only one way to find out." replied Hermione. She turned to Padma, who nodded and took a small rock from inside the bag that she was holding.

She placed it inside the sling of the trebuchet that Stephen and Wayne had designed and built.

A wave of her wand resized it back to its original scale. The intricate rune patterns placed on the rock by Hermione, Luna, Padma, Sally-Anne and Su Li could now be seen.

They had eventually found all that they needed to create their first golem. Now it was time for the test run.

The rock secure in the sling, Wayne grabbed the trigger handle and pulled. The rock, charmed to weigh no more than one hundred kilograms, was launched through the air before coming to rest some three hundred metres away.

The impact it made against the ground triggered the runes into action. The rock began to grow and expand. Stone and soil surrounding it arose from the ground to join it. Through rapid growth, reshaping and replicating, the rock quickly came to form something resembling a troll; it was certainly the same size, and roughly the same shape.

With long, strong arms, a robust torso and short yet powerful legs, their first earth golem stood ready for combat.

As the last rays of the evening sun vanished from sight, Bill Weasley and a couple of other Order members knowledgeable in ward-crafting activated the anti-apparition and anti-portkey wards that they had spent the day setting up around Knockturn Alley.

Leaning heavily on his staff, Alastor Moody stomped over to Neville "Amelia's just sent word. They've cut off all floo access for every building in this place."

Neville nodded and drew his wand "Good. Shall we then?"

Moody returned the nod and together he and Neville led the combined forces of the Order of the Phoenix and the Defence Association into Knockturn Alley.

As they moved down the street they broke off into groups, each group entering a different establishment. The main goal, however, was The Spiny Serpent. More dark deals were made in that pub than all the other buildings in Knockturn Alley combined.

Weary from the day's work, Nymphadora Tonks set her final report down on her Boss' desk. Harry Potter's words had been the kick up the arse that the Ministry had long been in need of.

It was a proud day to be an Auror. At long last Minister Fudge had given Amelia Bones the power to do her job properly, and as such the Ministry had today made its biggest and most positive move in years, not only in the war effort against Voldemort and his forces, but also in dragging the Wizarding World out of the stagnation that had hindered its growth and advancement for decades.

In efficiency uncharacteristic of every department within the Ministry, the entire Department of Magical Law Enforcement had come together to round up, not only every Death Eater and sympathiser who worked for the Ministry that had been named on the list supplied by Harry Potter, but also twenty three others.

Finally justice was being done.

Amelia looked up from her own work and smiled at the younger woman. An occasional klutz she may be, but Nymphadora Tonks was one of Amelia's favourite Aurors. Eager and efficient with a keen mind, Tonks was exactly what so many Aurors, such as Dawlish, failed to be: competent.

"Get some rest." Amelia told her "We're raiding houses in a few hours."

Tonks nodded and left, heading to the mess room to get some shut-eye.

Ronald Weasley was always a bit of a prat; often letting the fact that he was Arnold Potter's best friend go to his head, making him believe himself invincible.

That was the reason why he arrogantly strolled into Borgin and Burkes and demanded of Silas Borgin "Either set your wand down, or I'll be forced to hurt you."

It was also the reason why he was the first casualty of the night. Borgin's killing curse flared bright green as it snuffed out his life.

Before Ron even hit the ground, he was avenged by his brothers; the twins Fred and George. A pair of reductor curses later, and the wall behind the counter was decorated in a new colour called "Hint of Brain."

Scabior and his fellows might have been abroad recruiting a few allies to join Voldemort's cause, but The Spiny Serpent was still busy. The owner of the establishment, one Peter Vial, had come up with a brainwave to increase business and had quietly put out the word that tonight was a two-for the price of one night on all drinks and for use of the whores upstairs.

As such the wizards and witches of the Order of the Phoenix and the Defence Association had plenty of people to aim their wands at when they entered. The plan was simple, brutal and effective; hit hard, hit fast, and make sure the bastards won't get up again; through death if necessary.

Some of the patrons tried to fight back, but most were too drunk to aim their wands properly, and the Defence Association knew far too many shield charms to make anything less than a Killing Curse ineffective.

The bar room was soon clear and the group headed to the upper floor.

What they found there was so disgusting that many of them had to request that they be obliviated of the knowledge later.

The sick bastards making use of the upstairs facilities were treated with even less mercy than those in the bar below.

The victims, some of whom had been chained to the furniture, or drugged heavily with potions, were quickly removed to St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries. Some of them were so starved that even the best healers would struggle to keep them alive.

One of these rooms contained a child so young that Alastor 'Mad-Eye' Moody didn't bother using Magic on the paying customer getting ready to claim his purchase. Moody had never beaten a man to death before, but there was a first time for everything. After ten minutes, during which time Hannah had taken the girl from the room, the man lay in a crumpled and bloody heap on the floor, most of his ribs, both his legs and both his arms broken.

"Please..." he sobbed pathetically "please..."

Tired with the man's whining, Moody raised his staff, but he still did not cast a spell. Instead he brought it down heavily with as much force as he could muster, driving the end into the man's left eye socket and through to his brain.

The following morning, the wizards and witches of Wizarding Britain woke up to a different world.

In total seventy nine people were arrested and sent to Azkaban following the Ministry's internal purge. Thirty six more were arrested when Knockturn Alley was raided, and another forty seven were arrested following the late-night house raids that took place up and down the country.

The Daily Prophet had a field day. In an issue three times as thick as normal, they reported the successes of the Ministry and the Order of the Phoenix the previous day. The front page consisted of pictures of fifty of the arrestees, and above them in bold, black lettering was the headline:

**GOTCHA!**

The difference made was noticeable instantly. With so many of Voldemort's supporters now either dead or captures, Diagon Alley saw trade surge to levels last known around the time of the 1994 Quidditch World Cup. Shops were filled with eager and happy shoppers. People were once again stopped in the street to talk to one another.

You'd have thought that Voldemort himself had been killed.

Hannah returned from St Mungo's and slumped down into a seat next to Neville.

"How are the rescuees doing?" asked Harry.

"Fine for the most part." replied Hannah "The healers certainly haven't lost any yet. Most should be fine given a few days. We've discussed options with those who are up to it, and the majority of them want to be obliviated."

"What of the little girl Moody found?" asked Neville.

Hannah breathed out heavily "Well, the good news is she was never assaulted, the healers were able to ascertain that much. They thought that, given how well fed she is, that she wasn't there long. They were right. We've already found out who she is, but the bad news is that she's now alone. She was captured during a family get-together, during which the rest of her family was killed. We'll need to find a home for her."

"Bring her here if the healers need the space." said Luna "And any of the others if they're up to it. We can sort them out with their futures once we deal with Voldemort."

"When will that be?" asked Susan, who was sitting in an armchair by the fireplace.

"A couple of days." replied Harry "A week tops. Mum wants to give our numbers one final boost with those killed last night."

"How is the army looking?" asked Seamus.

Harry grinned "Why don't you come and look for yourself?"

He led them over to a large window and pulled back the heavy curtains covering it. Together the leaders of the Undesirables and the Defence Association stared out at the grounds below. Being on the second floor allowed them a good view of the grounds and what they contained.

That very afternoon Lily had finished her spell work on bodies of the Death Eaters that were killed in Hogsmeade. To make room for the bodies taken from the raid on Knockturn Alley the night before, she had activated the lot of them and sent them outside.

Almost eight hundred and fifty reanimated Dark Wizards were milling about on the lawn. These were people killed in battle in during The Battle of Hogsmeade, the Battle of Puddletown, the assassination attempt of Hermione and, of course, the night when both Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape met their demise.

Behind them were ten giants; seven alive, having been captured following the Battle of Puddletown, and the other three reanimated, having been killed in that same battle. With them stood the Forest Trolls of the Forbidden Forest. Luna had gone to collect their club-wielding allies that morning.

It was still a shame that they had burnt the bodies of those killed during the Siege of Longbottom Manor, but Lily now had enough bodies to bring their army of dead to just over an even thousand. That was more than enough to cause problems for Voldemort.

Stephen, Wayne and their team now had five trebuchets constructed, with more on the way, and Hermione and co. had eleven golems ready to go.

With the forces of the Ministry and the Order of the Phoenix also on their side, Harry was confident that Voldemort's final stand would not last long.

A/N: So what do you think? Ron's dead, not that it matters. I'm still unsure as to how much of this story there is left to go, but at the moment I'm thinking of perhaps one more chapter, containing the final battle, and then a short epilogue, but we'll see.

In case you are wondering, Voldemort's spell "Corpus excitare" means "Awaken Corpse".

## Chapter 26: The End is Nigh.

The Unicorn, the Re'em, and the Salamander lay dead. Blood dripped slowly from the slash marks on their bodies.

Voldemort took the vial and pressed it against an open wound on the Unicorn and watched as it filled with the silvery blood.

After awakening his army of Inferi, Voldemort had gone to the Gaunt Shack to check on the Horcrux there.

It was gone. He was forced to conclude that it had been destroyed. With the ring, the diary, the locket and Nagini destroyed, and the diadem and cup inaccessible, he found himself having to take drastic measures in the hope of getting stronger, especially after that damned Potter had drained so much of his power back in Hogsmeade.

He could not make another Horcrux; he could not afford to risk it. His soul was too small to split safely again. At least one of his Horcruxes was still active, that much he was sure of. The fact that he had survived when his body was destroyed during the Battle of Hogsmeade proved that much.

In his current form, latched onto the back of the head of one of his underlings, Voldemort knew that he was in a precarious position. He wanted to restore himself to his former glory, using the same potion that had done it before, but that would take time and resources he did not currently have.

Without Nagini to milk, Voldemort found himself having to look for other sources of sustenance. He needed to increase his strength and, preferably, his hold over Theodore Nott.

The blood of various magical creatures had varying levels of magical properties to them. The three animals lying dead before him had some of the most useful blood of all.

Unicorn blood contained life-giving properties. Drinking this would help Voldemort gain further control over the body he currently controlled. True, drinking the blood of a Unicorn was said to result in a curse on your life, but Voldemort did not worry about such trivial things; after all, he was Voldemort.



Re'em blood could give the drinker immense strength for a short period. Voldemort's own research proved that drinking a lot of it could make the effects last a long time. This blood would increase his physical strength and his resistance levels, making it harder for spells to harm him.

Finally the Salamander blood had healing and rejuvenating properties. Drinking a lot of this would enable his body to heal itself quickly; a handy skill in the middle of a battle.

The final battle was coming soon, Voldemort could sense it. With the Ministry and the Order taking such decisive action in the past few days, it was only a matter of time before they made a move to try and finish him.

Voldemort wanted to be as strong as he could to ensure that he not only survived, but also that he obliterated every single opponent that came his way.

His army had already returned to his side. Scabior had returned from the continent with five hundred witches and wizards who took to a life of crime. When pressed, Scabior had explained that, after picking up recruits in France, Belgium and Germany, he and his group had launched a quiet assault on a Wizard prison in Romania, killing the guards and releasing the three hundred and thirty seven inmates from their cells before persuading them to join their cause. That impressed Voldemort enough to reward Scabior and his closest friends with a Dark Mark each right there and then. The men had been honoured.

Barty Crouch and Macnair had taken a trip to the continent to bring back the Vampires and what remained of the Werewolves and Giants. Some of their numbers had fled following the disaster that had occurred in Hogsmeade, but that was no matter. The majority were still loyal, and those who were not would be hunted down and killed once Voldemort had control of Britain and could afford to turn his attentions to the continent.

Dolohov had come back as well, bringing with him another two hundred wizards. The names of Dolohov, Malfoy, Rowle and Lestranger had long been aligned with Voldemort, but though they were all for pure-blood supremacy, they were not considered to be

Ancient and Noble families like the Potters, the Bones', the Blacks and the Longbottoms. At least, not in Britain. They were families that were held in prestige in other countries; the Dolohovs in Russia, the Rowles in Norway, and the Malfoys and Lestranges in France.

During the war with Grindelwald, these had been some of the major families to sign up to fight under his banner. During that time, each of these families sent a son of theirs to Hogwarts, in order to keep an ear out on events in Britain. The then Deputy Headmaster Albus Dumbledore had persuaded the then Headmaster Armando Dippet to allow these students to attend in the hopes for increasing levels of international magical cooperation. It was at this school that those boys, Abraxas Malfoy, Alexandre LeStrange, Ivan Dolohov and Edvarg Rowle, amongst others, met the likes of Archibald Avery, Theophilus Mulciber, Owain Rosier and one Tom Marvolo Riddle. These boys quickly formed together in a gang, with Tom as their leader. Each was a member of Horace Slughorn's prestigious Slug Club, each had the brains and the power to achieve great things, and each believed greatly in the supremacy of the pure blood.

Following the defeat of Gellert Grindelwald by Albus Dumbledore in 1945, the group left school and, under the instructions of their families, Dolohov, Malfoy, LeStrange and Rowle stayed in Britain with the request to "keep watch" on things.

Tom flittered on and off the scene over the next few years, often disappearing for up to a month at a time before finally quitting his low-paying job at Borgin and Burke's and heading off to parts unknown. During his absence, Avery, Mulciber and Rosier ensured that Dolohov, Malfoy, LeStrange and Rowle were able to move in the right circles, eventually gaining themselves high standing in British social circles, introducing them to the likes of the Blacks, Carrows, Notts, Yaxleys and Macnairs.

Having vanished for a decade, Tom Riddle returned and soon assumed the new guise of Lord Voldemort. By this time, each of the men had begun to have families of their own, but upon seeing his power and hearing of his goals, Voldemort's seven schoolmates eagerly joined his side, with many of the Blacks, Carrows, Notts, Yaxleys and Macnairs doing the same.

Dolohov, Malfoy, LeStrange and Rowle all sent messages back to their home countries, informing their respective families of their new

roles. Their families highly supported this, and happily offered Voldemort funding. They wanted revenge against the British, whose Aurors had helped to hinder Grindelwald's efforts for years, and whose new leader, Albus Dumbledore, had been the one to cast the defeating blow against Grindelwald himself.

Voldemort's reign of terror began. By the time that first effort came to an end on the night that Voldemort decided to attack the Potter family, Dolohov, Lestrangle and Rowle had all been killed, as had Avery, Mulciber and Rosier. Their sons had by that time, taken their places. Abraxas Malfoy, on the other hand, had been sent to France on Voldemort's orders. Injured in battle against the Aurors, Voldemort had decided that the man was better off recruiting new wands. Lucius Malfoy had stepped up to hold his father's position in the ranks of the Death Eaters.

By the time Voldemort returned, Abraxas Malfoy was too old and weak to fight. The sons of Dolohov, Lestrangle, Rowle and Mulciber, amongst many others, were in Azkaban, and Lucius, along with the surviving Avery, Nott, Yaxley, Macnair, the Carrows, and the likes of Crabbe and Goyle had bribed their way out of trouble. Evan Rosier, the last of the Rosiers was dead.

Following his return to power, the Dolohovs, Malfoys, Lestranges, Rowles and other families continued to send money to fund Voldemort's operations in Britain, hoping that Voldemort would bring it down.

Now, though, Voldemort's ranks were broken. Antonin Dolohov was the only descendent of the foreign families still alive. The message Voldemort had ordered Dolohov to give those families was a simple one: You want Britain to fall? Then grab your wands.

And they had.

Suspecting that the call to arms may come their way, many Malfoys, Dolohovs, Rowles and Lestranges, and many members of their extended families, had readied themselves, training themselves for combat.

When Antonin Dolohov had called upon them, they responded with eagerness. They themselves had arrived that morning, bringing with

them the promise that many of their own allies would be coming the following evening.

Voldemort took another drink of Salamander blood as he thought over the strength of his forces; close to eight hundred witches and wizards, with the promise on more on the way; twelve Giants, approximately two hundred and fifty Vampires, sixty Werewolves and around five thousand Inferi.

Voldemort was fairly certain that even the combined forces of the Ministry and the Order would not get past that.

To say that Yannick Malfoy was less than impressed was a bit of an understatement. A messenger from the supposedly notorious Lord Voldemort had met with himself and several other high standing families across the continent, calling them to arms. Antonin Dolohov claimed that Britain was weak and ready to fall. Lord Voldemort desired more wands to finally bring it down once and for all.

Yannick had responded immediately, calling on his sons and their sons, and his brothers, their sons and their sons to join him in battle.

When they got to Britain, however, they and the Lestranges, the first to arrive, were met with a bizarre sight. Lord Voldemort did not have a body of his own. Instead he clung to the body of one of his own underlings, nothing more than a parasite. Of course, he did "talk the talk", as it were, but in his current state he simply failed to "walk the walk", so to speak. He might have been a mighty and terrifying leader at one point, but he was anything but that now.

After meeting with Voldemort, the Malfoys and Lestranges were shown to their quarters; areas of the manor house that they were in that were to use for rest.

Yannick had quickly met with Guillaume Lestrage and the two heads of their respective families quickly reached the same conclusion: Voldemort had to go.

Words with Tormod, head of the Rowle family of Norway and Jaroslav, head of the Dolohov family of Russia proved that the two men were equally as unimpressed with Lord Voldemort.

A plan was quickly implemented. It was obvious that, for whatever reason, Voldemort held some level of fear over the people of Britain. That fear would be useful in overthrowing the British Ministry. After that, Voldemort's usefulness would end, so they would dispose of him. Britain would become their new power base, and they would build up an army so mighty that it would overthrow any opponent with ease.

Already they had sent word to their allies across Europe, calling all the old supporters of Grindlewald to arms. Many of them had already sent word back, promising to give whatever assistance they required.

Each family had its own plans for the upcoming battle. All of the Malfoys and Dolohovs were highly skilled in combat, and the Rowles could use ancient magic to great effect.

And the Lestranges... well, let's just say that their family name meant "The Strange One" for a reason.

Yannick smirked into his glass of finest French wine.

Yes, Britain would pay for what it did during the rise of Grindelwald.

"Is everything ready?" asked Harry.

"Yes." replied Lily.

"When do you want us to make our move?" asked Hermione.

"Tonight." Harry answered.

Nymphadora Tonks stood in the front room of her flat, checking that she had everything. Her wand plus three spares, two daggers and dragon hide armour were all in place.

Tonight was going to be the big one. Harry Potter had everything ready on his end, and now asked that the Ministry and the Order of the Phoenix join his group in the final push to bring down Lord Voldemort one and for all.

Tonks herself would have a large role to play tonight. Amelia had asked that she be a unit leader. She would be in charge of eleven

other Aurors on the battlefield, directing and co-ordinating their attacks against Voldemort's forces. That was a huge level of responsibility and, even though Tonks could now be considered a senior Auror, it was not something she had ever been entrusted with before. Tonks vowed to herself to give it everything that she had.

She respected Amelia Bones greatly, and held the woman in his esteem, but there was one way in which she did not want to be like her boss. Amelia had never married; the high rank put most men off. Tonks could relate to that of course, though her problem was made worse by the fact that she was also a metamorphmagus. Tonks had found that most men she dated were also swine. Being unintimidated by her high rank amongst the Aurors also seemed to mean that those men were rather more inclined to ask her to morph her appearance into that of someone else. These men often ended up receiving a stinging hex to hard-to-reach places.

Tonks had concluded long ago that she needed a kind man in her life; someone who was sensitive and would not even think of asking her to change her appearance. Unfortunately it was those men who were intimidated by her high status among the Aurors.

Tonks gave a sigh. Perhaps when the war was over...

Alastor Moody's magical eye swivelled towards the mirror above the fireplace in his front room. Looking back at him was a tired and battle-worn old man who had spent far too long fighting practitioners of the Dark Arts.

That, however, was all that he had left.

There were many people in the world who might not believe it, but this battle-hardened old curmudgeon had a heart inside of him; and of all the injuries that he had ever received, the breaking of that heart was the one that had hurt the worst, and still hurt as strongly today as it did the day it had occurred. He forgot about it at times, but it was always there, just below the surface, waiting to rear its head in moments when he was alone, or left to his thoughts.

Moody reached into his pocket and took out the small, golden, circular locket that he always kept by his heart. His rough-skinned thumb flicked the catch and the locket swung open, and there she was.

Agnes Brody.

The two of them had been in the same house and year at Hogwarts. There they formed a deep friendship. After Hogwarts, they joined the Aurors together. They went through their training together, and graduated from the Auror Academy at the same time. It was around that time that their relationship had become something more. Unfortunately the war got in the way. While it was true that many couples at this time did elope together, there was far too much pressure on the Aurors for them to even think of such things.

But one Christmas, Alastor and Agnes made each other a promise; once the war was done, they would marry. Her agreement to marry him was one of the happiest days of Alastor Moody's life.

Five months later, Agnes died.

She and Alastor had gone after the Death Eater Evan Rosier and his accomplice Warren Wilkes. This was a big target; the Ministry had already nailed Owain Rosier, one of Voldemort's inner circle, several months previously, and Evan, though still relatively young, had stepped up to take his father's place.

Together Alastor and Agnes had tracked down the pair of Death Eaters at the entrance to Knockturn Alley. There were three others with them. Alastor stunned Wilkes and was duelling another when Agnes flung a body-bind curse at one of the lower-rank Death Eaters. The curse hit, but Rosier had taken his chance and cast the killing curse at her.

There was nothing that Alastor could do to save her.

Instead he threw the Death Eater that he had been duelling to the ground, and then turned on Rosier. In the ensuing fight, Alastor lost a large chunk out of his nose. He managed to disarm Rosier and bind him in ropes before turning his attention to the other Death Eaters. They were gone, including Wilkes.

Furious with himself for letting them give him the slip, dizzy from blood loss, and distraught over the death of Agnes, Alastor Moody had rounded on Evan Rosier.

That was the first time that Moody had ever used the killing curse on someone. Three days later he managed to track down Wilkes again, and the man became second on that list.

The first war with Voldemort ended a year and a half later.

Now old, heavily scarred, and with only one real leg, Alastor Moody felt that he was too far gone to be fighting. But then, that was what he had done his entire life. And he felt that he owed it to Agnes to see this thing through to the end.

And anyway, if he died tonight, then he would get to see her again.

And hopefully he would be able to take as many of those Death Eater bastards down with him as he could.

Remus Lupin poured himself a shot of fire whiskey and downed it.

The war would be over soon, one way or the other.

Once again the image of her face flashed across his mind's eye.

Ever since the tale of Harry and Arnold Potter had been revealed in its entirety by Lily, Remus had been thinking of his old girlfriend Georgina Samson a lot. She was the one who had cast herself between Voldemort's wand and the Potter boys on that fateful Halloween night so many years ago.

Remus was forced to wonder if she knew. Lily's other friends from her school days, Sarah, Serena and Hestia knew. Had Lily seen fit to tell Georgina as well?

In a way it didn't matter. To be honest, Georgina's death had been a relief, to an extent, as she had not been a well woman. Not since that run-in with Travers. Georgina had been visiting Marlene McKinnon when Travers and a group of lower-ranking Death Eaters had launched an attack on the McKinnon family home. Marlene and her entire family had perished in the attack, and Georgina had been seriously injured.

Aurors Frank and Alice Longbottom, along with a group of others, were the first to arrive on the scene. They found Travers using a



silver dagger to cut deep marks into a barely conscious Georgina's skin.

The significance of utilising a silver dagger to torture the girlfriend of a known Werewolf was not lost on anyone.

Those wounds healed easily. The problem was the poison that the dagger had been coated with. Travers was known for experimenting with potions; and poisons in particular. The poison was unidentifiable, something of Travers' own making. Even under veritaserum he refused to tell anyone what was in it. He took great pleasure, however, in telling the court that the poison guaranteed a slow and agonising death.

And in the three months between her receiving the wounds, and her death at the hands of Lord Voldemort, Georgina had suffered greatly; often finding herself almost paralysed with great pain, feeling nauseous most of the time, and losing a lot of weight. The "good days" as she referred to them, were few and far between. Lily had said later that the day Georgina died had been one of those "good days", so Remus could at least take solace in the fact that for her last few hours of life, she had not been suffering.

And she was not in pain anymore.

James and Sirius had often tried to get him to move on from her, to find someone new. But it was just too hard. And being a Werewolf certainly made the task much more difficult.

Maybe once this blasted war was finally over...

Rubeus Hagrid was marching through the Forbidden Forest, having just checked up on a Thestral foal that was just a couple of days old when he heard it; a voice, talking.

"So you'll do it?"

"Yes." came the reply, though it was barely audible through all the clicking "Your master's offer is most generous. We will strike before the night is through."

Hagrid knew that kind of speech. Peering through the gloom he could see it; an Acromantula. It was Mesoth, the oldest son of

Hagrid's former pet Acromantula, Aragog. He had been talking to a man in black robes.

Hagrid remained hidden as Mesoth turned and scuttled away. The man turned too, and marched off in the direction opposite to Mesoth. Right towards Hagrid.

Hagrid stayed more still and silent than he had ever done in his entire life. Then, just as the man was passing, Hagrid reached out and grabbed a hold of him. He swung the man around and slammed him against a tree with such force that the man dropped his wand.

Hagrid glared at the man, recognising his face.

It was Phillip Doyle, one of the Death Eaters who had accompanied Walden Macnair to recruit the Giant Colony of the Ural Mountains. It seemed the Ministry had not caught everyone.

"Talk," growled Hagrid "Fast."

James Potter handed the small stoppered vial containing three of his hairs and a sample of his saliva over to a young woman who he didn't know and watched her hurry away with it. In a matter of minutes, Ginny's Weasley's illegitimate child would officially be recognised as his. He wasn't entirely sure how to feel about that, but then again he wasn't entirely sure who to feel about a lot of things these days.

His marriage was a sham, something forced upon his wife against her will and without his knowledge. The person he had raised as his son was dead, if such a phrase could technically be applied to someone who was never actually alive in the first place.

Not only that, but his real son, his actual son had been raised in secret by his wife without any knowledge or input on his part.

Lily's reasons were bizarre, but ultimately understandable.

That bastard Dumbledore had a lot to answer for, not least of which was somehow persuading James' parents to sign a marriage contract for James and Lily.

James still suspected the Imperius curse.

James wanted to talk to Harry, but he was not sure how to do so. He had managed to speak to Lily about it, and her response had been simple:

"It's entirely up to Harry as to whether or not he wants you in his life. He doesn't need you to be a father to him. Maybe one day you'll be able to have a few beers with him in the Leaky Cauldron, but your relationship will never be father-son. But, please, just wait until everything is over. Harry's got more than enough on his plate right now."

It hurt, but he knew that she was right. Harry was too grown up, too mature, too much of a leader to require a father. That much was evident when the Order and the Ministry met with him.

Perhaps the best James really could hope for was to share a few beers with him once all this was over.

He would look forward to it.

Minerva McGonagall was in two minds about the upcoming battle; she was looking forward to it and dreading it at the same time. She looked forward to it because now, after years of war, it would be the dark side that knew fear for once. She had every confidence that they would win, but she dreaded the outcome.

Who would die?

That was a question that was not worth thinking about.

She looked across the staff room to Filius Flitwick and Pomona Sprout. She could tell that her long-time co-workers were as anxious about the upcoming battle as she was.

Following the disaster that had occurred in Hogsmeade, the Hogwarts' board of Governors had taken the decision to close the school. That decision was quickly reversed when the Ministry's purge revealed that Governor Titus Buckweed was a marked Death Eater. Given how it was he who had insisted that the teaching staff and the Governors have a meeting at the time of the Hogsmeade trip, most people could guess the truth, and the veritaserum confirmed it.

Fudge had insisted that the school reopen, not only to the students, but also the survivors of the Battle of Hogsmeade. Minerva was more than happy to welcome both groups.

Some students had not returned, but the majority of parents still preferred to know that their children were safe inside the nigh-on impenetrable walls of Hogwarts. Trips beyond those walls, however, were banned.

Checking one more time that her wand and her spare were on her person, Minerva turned to the rest of the teachers and said "Right, let's go."

They had barely gotten out of the staff room door when a huffing and puffing Hagrid came running towards them.

"Pr'fesser McGonagall, 'Ogwarts is gonna be attacked."

"How did you find that out?" asked Minerva.

"I was in th' forest an' I 'eard some voices. It were a Death Eater, name of Doyle, an' 'e was talkin' ter one o' th' Acromantulas. I managed to catch 'im, an' 'e told me, af'er it roughed 'im up a bit. 'E said tha' Voldermort wan'ed our attention elsewhere, summat about dividin' our forces. So 'e sent this Doyle ter convince sum of th' creatures aroun' 'ere to attack us. Doyle's succeeded, an' th' Acromantulas an' a horde o' Moun'ain Trolls are on their way."

Minerva frowned. This was not good.

"Where is the Death Eater?" she asked.

Hagrid suddenly looked rather bashful "Er, ter tell yeh th' truth, I sorta lost me temper with 'im and migh've broke 'is neck."

Minerva sighed and said "Well, that's once less sycophant at Voldermort's side at least. Filius, would you be so kind as to send word to Harry Potter? We cannot leave the school unattended at this time."

Flitwick nodded and hurried off.

"Tell him not to worry about us, and not to send any forces our way." Minerva called after the charms master "That's exactly what Voldemort is hoping for."

She turned to the others "We'd better secure the castle."

She raised her wand "Piertotum Locomotor."

Amelia stared around the room that had been her office for the past several decades. She couldn't shake the feeling that this would be the last time that she did so.

For a while now she had been wanting to retire. She wanted to step down and let someone else deal with all the paperwork and petty bureaucracy instead.

She like her friend Alastor Moody had been fighting Voldemort for far too long now. Realistically she was certain that she had no real place on the battlefield anymore, but every wand was needed.

She idly wondered how many would die in the upcoming battle before it was all over. Would she be amongst them?

One thing she knew for certain; either way, this was her last battle.

There was a knock on her door, which stood partially ajar.

"Boss?"

She turned and saw her favourite Auror standing there. Nymphadora Tonks was, like Amelia, proof that women could fight just as well as the men.

"It's time." said Tonks.

Amelia nodded. She took on last glance around the room, and then headed out.

In the larger room beyond her office door she met with Tonks, Kingsley Shacklebolt, John Dawlish, Jacob Proudfoot and Jerald Williamson.

They were her best, and longest serving Aurors and it was they who would be leading their comrades into battle.

"Right," she said, with a somewhat heavy heart "let's go."

"I will not stay behind!" raged Daphne.

"Nor will I." added Hannah.

"Listen to me, all of you." said Harry calmly. Mostly he was talking to Daphne and Hannah, but he made sure that Tracey, Astoria, Lisa, Katie, Leanne, Demelza and Vicky knew that he was addressing them also.

"Once this battle starts, we are going to have a constant stream of injured fighters coming back here to seek treatment, and someone has got to be here to provide that treatment.

His statement was met with furious glares, but no one said anything. They could not argue with it, even if they didn't like it; someone had to be here to administer aid, and they were the ones best suited to do it. All of them had, after all, served as their respective groups' de-facto healers for some years.

"I'm not asking you to be approving of this," continued Harry "just look at it from a logical perspective."

"Fine." snapped Daphne "Just don't leave us worrying for too long."

"I'll end it as quick as I can." replied Harry before turning away.

Hermione, Luna, Padma, Su and Sally-Anne gave Daphne looks of sympathy before turning to hurry off after him.

Hannah reached out and grabbed Susan's arm.

"Please, bring Neville home when all this is done." she asked.

Susan smiled and her oldest and best friend and gave a nod of her head.

The Aurors arrived first, bringing with them a dozen of their own healers. They joined Daphne, Hannah and the others.

Then an owl from Hogwarts arrived, alerting them to the situation faced by the school. Harry wanted to send help to them, but Lily talked him out of it.

"Hogwarts can survive this. We need to concentrate on our own target. The longer we wait, the stronger Voldemort's ranks become."

Over the next quarter of an hour, the last few members of the order trickled in. Once the last of them was accounted for, Harry looked around at them all.

"We will be leaving in the next few minutes. Until then, the House Elves will be handing each of you a brooch. This is a portkey. If you get too injured to fight, get a hold of it, say "Resistance" and you will be brought back here."

Everyone nodded.

As the House Elves, including Dobby and Winky moved about and handed out brooches, a few more people moved to join the healers that would be staying behind; Molly and Ginny Weasley, Narcissa, Harry's sisters, Charlotte and Isabella, and half a dozen others.

Once everyone was ready, Harry disappeared to the pre-arranged co-ordinates.

Everyone else who was to fight followed.

To Be Continued...

A problem that I usually have in writing is that I don't seem to delve into people's thoughts too much unless it is Harry, Hermione or Luna. I think I did a fairly good job of amending that here.

Sorry for the evil cliffy. The good news is that I have written out a plan of what I want to happen in the final battle, the problem now is putting those notes into a coherent chapter. Somehow I don't think you lot would appreciate having the final battle presented to you in the bullet-point form that it is currently in, so you might have to wait a bit.

For those of you wondering, I never intended for James to be evil. It was Hannah's father who was the evil, abusive one. James genuinely knew nothing about the marriage contract that forced Lily to be with him. I think of James to be how Gandalf describes Pippin in The Return of the King "A fool, but an honest fool."

And hey, Harry's sisters, Charlotte and Isabella finally appear in person. Is it a bad thing that I had to go back and search the story for a hint as to what their names were? This story is so different from what I had originally intended, that the chance to bring them in more has never really presented itself. I don't know how much of them we'll see in the future, either.



## Chapter 27: The Final Battle

The staff of Hogwarts, the sixth and seventh year students, and the surviving denizens of Hogsmeade manned the battlements on the western side of the castle, watching their enemies attack.

The Mountain Trolls had attacked first. Minerva had sent an assault wave of stone statues and suits of armour to counter the attack.

The lights of the castle lit up the grounds enough to allow the group manning the defences to see the Trolls wreaking havoc on the animated objects with their clubs as they battled at the edge of the Forbidden Forest.

A roar of pain echoed across the grounds, and one of the Trolls fell.

Then from amongst the trees came a black swarm. At least a hundred Acromantula, each with a leg span of at least fifteen feet, scuttled through, over and around the fight between the Trolls and statues, and swarmed towards the castle.

Hagrid was the first to respond. As much as he loved Aragog, he loved Hogwarts more, and if Aragog's children decided to align themselves with Voldemort and attack the castle for him, then really there was only one option, no matter how much Hagrid hated it.

He raised his pink umbrella, aimed it at one of the Acromantula that was near the front and roared at the top of his voice the spell that Tom Riddle had once used to try and kill Aragog.

"Arania Exumai!"

A white jet of light shot from the tip of Hagrid's umbrella and struck the giant spider, which exploded.

Either side of Hagrid, many of the other defenders of Hogwarts followed his lead. Others waited for the Acromantula to come closer, and then sent blasts of fire down to the ground. Professor Flitwick then began casting charms that allowed him to take control of the flames, and he used them to corral the giant spiders together, making them easier to hit, and making it nearly impossible for them to turn and flee.

The spiders tried to scale the walls, but there were too many wands raining spells down upon them.

But then the Trolls finished their fighting with the statues, and turned their attentions back to the castle itself.

"Is it done?" asked Harry.

Bill nodded "Yes. We've placed our wards in a dome around us. You break through Voldemort's wards, and he'll be trapped by ours."

"Are you sure that they're powerful enough for that?" asked Hermione.

"Yes," said Fleur "Anyone trying to disappear will be met with a violent and bloody death, just as you asked."

"And what if Voldemort takes it upon himself to attack the wards himself?" asked Harry.

"The wards are anchored by thirty keystones." said Bill "Unless he finds and locates at least twenty of them, there will be no bringing these wards down."

Harry nodded "Good," he said "You have done well. Please return to your unit, and await instruction."

Bill and Fleur both nodded and headed off to join the ranks of the Order.

"What do you think?" asked Hermione.

"That Bill and Fleur Weasley are some of the best that the Order's got." replied Harry "And as much as I distrust the Goblins after they sold me out, they pay those two highly for a reason."

Hermione nodded and stood back.

Harry surveyed the scene before him. They were at the top of a hill. The Undesirables and the Defence Association were at the highest point, mingled together in one group, which is what they were now. They were flanked on their left by every halfway competent fighter

that the Ministry of Magic had to offer, and to the right by the Order of the Phoenix.

Most importantly, in front of them, at the foot of the hill was the vast horde of undead. Lily's army of puppets were not truly alive, but they were far superior to the Inferi that the Dark Lord was so fond of. Most Inferi could barely walk, many of them only capable of crawling. And they killed by brute strength alone. Lily's puppets were better than that. By no means were any of them up to the standard of Arnold or Draco, as there was no need for them to be. They could move well, they could use magic, they could understand basic verbal commands, but if you looked into their eyes, there was no spark of life, something which made Arnold and Draco far more convincing.

Scattered amongst the army were ten trebuchets, each one ready to launch enchanted rocks that would become golems out onto the battlefield. There was a line of Giants, both living and reanimated, and two lines of Forest Trolls standing patiently, waiting for the order to attack. And behind them all, also awaiting the attack command, was Fluffy the Cerberus. Harry had retrieved him from the bunker beneath his cottage home several hours before.

Before this army was a large manor house, once home to The Noble and Ancient House of Nott, not that there was much of that house left now. It was not build to survive a siege; it relied on its wards for its protection.

"Luna, Neville and Susan" Harry called "do you have your swords?"

Neville came forward "Of course, Harry." he said as Susan and Luna nodded

"Together, then." said Harry, drawing his sword from the scabbard at his side. Neville nodded, and drew his own sword, with Luna and Susan mirroring them.

"One... two... three! Solvite claustra!"

The Most Noble and Most Ancient Houses of Potter, Longbottom and Bones were amongst the oldest in Wizarding Britain, with family trees stretching further back than the time of the Founders of Hogwarts themselves, and the same could be said of the Lovegoods,

though they originally came from Ireland. The swords that each of them drew were ancient and powerful; usually only ceremonious now, once upon a time, Potters, Longbottoms, Bones' and Lovegoods of old used these swords, rumoured to have their origins with Merlin, to wield magic that was both great and terrible.

And today, the heirs of those four houses used the swords to wield their magic once more.

Raw magical energy caused the air to crackle around the quartet as their spells powered up. They aimed their blades so that the point of each was aimed at the manor house before them.

Blue bolts of magic shot from the end of each sword and slammed into the wards protecting Nott Manor. The wards flared brightly upon impact and then dissolved into nothingness.

Voldemort's protections were down, and he was now trapped inside the ward dome erected by Bill, Fleur and their co-workers.

Inside the Manor, Voldemort felt the wards vanish. Furious, he rounded on Dolohov.

"Send out all our forces and crush whoever dares to attack us here!"

Dolohov nodded and left Voldemort's private room.

Voldemort turned and made his way over to the large picture window that allowed him to a view of the grounds. In the darkness, he could just about make the outline of a large army gathered around a small hill.

Potter was out there somewhere, he knew it.

Harry watched as the swarm of Inferi became the first to leave the manor.

He raised his sword above his head and swung it in a circle.

In response every trebuchet was activated, each one launching their enchanted boulders onto the battlefield before them.

The earth golems exploded into life and began wading their way through the Inferi, crushing any in their path.

Three of the enchanted boulders had an extra trick added in; when they exploded into life, they were surrounded by flame. Padma and Su had not been entirely sure of their calculations, but now they had proof that they had gone everything right, as the fire golems roared into life.

Naturally the Inferi feared these and scrambled away from their burning heat, but they were not fast enough, and the fire golems soon began to roast many of them.

The trebuchets launched a second round as Lily used her magic to activate her puppets. Led by the Albus Dumbledore, Severus Snape and Bellatrix Lestrange, the army of reanimates draw their wands and charged forth to meet the army of Inferi as the werewolves, vampires and Death Eaters to leave the manor house in droves to join the fray.

On Harry's side, the Ministry and the Order began to move towards the mêlée.

The final battle for Wizarding Britain had begun.

As their fellow fighters moved towards the source of conflict, seven members of the Lestrange family stood in a circle around the head of their family, Guillaume Lestrange, as they chanted loudly in Latin:

"Veni nobis demon umbra procedure exitium hostibud hodie. Veni nobis demon umbra procedure exitium hostibud hodie. Veni nobis demon umbra procedure exitium hostibud hodie."

Voldemort watched with intrigue as seven black rings appeared on the ground at different points across the battlefield. Each ring grew and expanded until they each measured twenty feet across. Then creatures, huge, scaly, black creatures that looked like a cross between a dragon and a giant began to rise up out of the centre of those rings.

Demons.

A part of Voldemort was thrilled; seven demons, each thirty feet in height would easily ensure that this battle was won in no time.

But another part of him was furious; the Lestrangle family could do magic like this? Had he actually known that he's have ditched Bellatrix, Rodolphus and Rabastan years ago. Why had those three never done something like this for their cause?

"Holy shit!" exclaimed Luna as the demons emerged onto the battlefield.

The demon closest to them gave a roar and swung the huge sword in its hand through the air in a powerful sweep, obliterating at least forty of Lily's reanimates and two earth golems in one fell swoop.

Harry forced himself to get over his shock at the appearance of the demons. He grabbed his sword and the Elder wand and held the two in a cross above his head.

"Meteoron imber!"

An orb of white light formed from where the wand and the sword crossed and it shone brightly. From this a stream of rocks surrounded by fire shot out like bullets. They rocketed through the air and began to slam into the demon, which roared in agony as the meteorites pelted against its body. After around twenty had hit it, the creature slumped over and crashed to the ground, crushing as many Inferi as reanimates it had destroyed before.

The remaining meteorites continued on to crash into the ground, sending up explosions of earth and fire amongst the enemy ranks.

Hermione turned to Harry with a wide eyed stare. He was bent over, hands on his knees, sweating profusely and breathing heavily.

"How long have you been able to do that?" she asked.

"First time." he panted. At her surprised look he added "What? I wasn't sitting around doing nothing whilst you, Luna and the others were researching golems, you know."

Hermione smiled at him before turning her attention back to the battle before them.

The demon that Harry had killed was melting into nothingness, but the remaining six were still going strong.

It was obvious that Harry would not be doing that meteorite spell again for some time.

Neville provided the next surprise. Stepping forward, he raised his wand high and shouted loudly

"Fulgur persusserit!"

A pulse of magic shot from the tip of Neville's wand and up into the dark clouds above. Quickly he lowered his wand and raised his sword, and just in time. Seven bolts of lightning shot down from the sky and struck the sword, which absorbed the power.

Then, glowing with power, Neville aimed his sword at one of the demons. A massive pulse of electricity shot along the length of the sword and exploded from the end. It struck the demon and it exploded into vapour.

Neville, like Harry, would not be doing that again anytime soon.

As the reanimates swarmed around the feet of the demons to clash with the army of Inferi, the Death Eaters and Vampires swooped over them and began to assault the Ministry wizards and the Order.

Harry took a step forwards, but Hermione grabbed his arm "You need to recover your magic so that you can face Voldemort."

Harry nodded.

Susan, meanwhile, had turned to Lavender, Cho and Parvati.

"Guys, do me a favour and drench that demon over there." she pointed to the demon that was tearing its way through the reanimates on the right hand side.

The three women nodded and aimed their wands at the foul monster.

"Aqua eructo!"

Powerful jets of water shot from the ends of each of their wands and drenched the demon. It turned to them and roared in anger, but Susan already had her sword aimed at it.

"Aera rigentem!"

A freezing blast of air was emitted from the end of Susan's sword and the drenched demon was frozen in place, enormous icicles hanging from it.

In response to the felling of three of its comrades, one of the demons gave a great bellow of rage and jumped into the air. Several flaps of its wings carried far enough to land on the largest of the trebuchets. The trebuchet and everyone who had been near it was crushed.

In response, Padma called for a volley of blasting hexes to be fired at the monster. A hundred voices shouted "Confringo" and the demon was brought down in a hail of fiery explosions.

Hermione had to hold Harry back from joining in. He knew that he really needed to get his magical strength back, but both Wayne and Stephen had been manning that trebuchet. Both were certainly dead.

Two of Harry's friends were gone. This was the first time that that had happened since his group had begun to actively participate in the war. Sure, the Undesirables had lost a couple of people in Hogsmeade, but this was the first time that the victims were Harry's close friends.

He wanted to move. He wanted to fight. He wanted to destroy more demons, to kill Death Eaters. He wanted to tear Voldemort apart, limb from limb.

And Hermione knew this.

"I know, Harry" she whispered soothingly in his ear "I know you want to go, but you have to wait. You have to."

She was right, but Harry didn't have to like it.

Back at Hogwarts, Minerva McGonagall brought down the last of the Mountain Trolls with a bombardment spell.



As it crashed to the ground, she turned to the others.

"Students stay here; keep an eye on the younger ones. Everyone else who wants to fight, come with me, we might be able to join the battle against Voldemort.

Everyone nodded and began to split up. The Mountain Trolls, like the Acromantula before them had been unable to scale the castle's walls. Help in the form of Grawp's fists certainly moved the fight along. The marauding Trolls had gotten halfway to the castle when Grawp had come charging out of the forest to begin to fight with those closest to him. He had crushed at least six.

The threat over, the defenders were free to go and join the other major battle.

Those who wished to keep fighting followed Minerva from the school, across the grounds and beyond the ward line. From there they took the portkey that Harry had arranged from them

Minerva held it out and, once they all had a finger touching it, she called out the activation password.

"Hope."

Daphne was seriously considering what spells she would use to torture Harry when he came back. The nerve of that man, leaving her here with Molly Weasley of all people. Thankfully the old harpy was working at the opposite end of the room, so it was her daughter Ginny that was bearing the brunt of the woman's moaning.

Already there were wounded coming in, beaten, battered, bruised and bloody. Fifty beds were occupied already.

Daphne wondered what horrors they had been facing, but most were not up to saying. One patient, and Auror, might have said something that sounded like "Demons." but she couldn't be sure. It didn't seem possible. There were, of course, plenty of accounts of Gellert Grindelwald summoning that kind of power to his side during the 1940's, but surely if Voldemort had had that kind of power he would've unleashed it before now.

Daphne was brought out of her thoughts as a portkey arrived, bringing with it most of Hogwarts' staff and a few others.

"I take it the defence of the castle went well?" she asked them, but without waiting for an answer she continued "They've already gone into battle. You're more than welcome to go and join them, though we could do with one or two more wands here."

Madam Pomfrey had already moved in to lend a hand with the healing. Six others followed her, but the rest stayed with McGonagall, who asked

"Where is the battle taking place?"

"Nott Manor." replied Daphne "Apparate to the hilltop that stands to the east."

McGonagall nodded and led the rest into battle.

Nymphadora Tonks was well into the battle now. The shouts and screams of war filled the air around her with an almost deafening cacophony of noise. Jets of light shot everywhere as her allies and opponents alike rained spell after spell down upon each other. She herself had just fired off what seemed like hundreds of Incendio spells in order to get through the hordes of Inferi that separated her and her fellow Aurors from the real opponents; the Death Eaters.

Overhead many swirls of black smoke, white mist and purple plumes chased each other through the air, attacking each other and raining spells down upon those fighting below.

She could just make out one of the fire golems as it swung its massive, flaming arm, incinerating six Inferi in one go.

The good news was that she and her group of Aurors, well the eight that had survived anyway, were not near enough to any of the surviving three demons.

She had seen what one of those things had done to Proudfoot and his men, but she really did not want to remember it. All twelve of that group had been killed in the blink of the eye.

A Death Eater charged at her, firing off a spell. Tonks blocked his cutting hex and returned fire. The man hit the ground with half of his head missing.

Alastor Moody shot down several of the Inferi with blasts of fire from his wand before raising his staff high and then slamming it to the ground. A wave of fire shot forward, torching a good dozen of the Inferi in seconds. Those nearest them reeled backwards in fear.

Moody launched another ball of fire into them and then made his way forward. Death Eaters were near.

Kingsley Shacklebolt was ahead of both Tonks and Moody and was now well in amongst the Death Eater ranks. Being surrounded on all sides with only six other wands to back you up might've sounded like a bad situation to be in, but these were no ordinary Death Eaters. Led by that rat bag Scabior, these Death Eaters were all a lot like him; petty criminals with a mean streak, but no real power or skill. And even fewer had the conviction needed to cast a killing curse.

Kingsley knew most of these men, having been an Auror for so long meant that he had arrested many of them. A part of an Auror always hopes that somehow being caught and punished for your crimes would help set a man back on the straight and narrow.

This was almost never the case. Kingsley had arrested many of these men many times over and they never changed.

And now that they had aligned themselves with Voldemort, Kingsley had no more sympathy for their plight. They weren't werewolves, on the bottom rung because of a bite, or Muggleborns, struggling to find jobs in a world that had always favoured the purebloods. No these men came from families of high rank, and most of them had brought their fates upon themselves by doing things that got them booted out of their families, usually by bringing disgrace upon them by practicing the Dark Arts.

Kingsley Shacklebolt was out of pity; and these crooks were now learning why Auror Shacklebolt was not a man to cross.

Amelia was in trouble and she knew it. Her team had been too close to one of the Demons when it was summoned. Only she and two others had gotten away from it. She had now fought her way through

the Inferi, but had lost her two partners along the way. Now she was fighting the Death Eaters, and she was alone.

"Hermione, we need to go." said Harry. He didn't want to wait any longer.

To be honest, every instinct she had was telling Hermione to tell everyone to get the hell out of here, but she knew that she could not. This was it. Voldemort's forces had to be stymied here, today, lest the Wizarding world fall once and for all.

She nodded and Harry stood. Neville and Susan stood to his left, Hermione and Luna to his right. Behind them Padma, Sally-Anne, Su and the others formed ranks.

The defenders of Hogwarts arrived on the battlefield and were shocked by the scene before them. Three huge demons were crashing their way across the battlefield, crushing everything in their path. Fires roared in every direction, Giants from both sides brought their clubs down on the heads of their smaller opponents, Vampires and Werewolves ran amok, trebuchets fired stones into battle, Inferi tore into their opponents and everywhere wizards and witches duelled for their very lives.

"Come on." Minerva instructed as she became surrounded in a white mist, and she flew off into battle. Those who could do the same followed her, soaring towards the battlefield and throwing curses down onto their foes. Those who were unable to use that method of motion and followed Hagrid's lead, wading their way into battle and throwing down any foe who dared get in their way.

Luna slashed her wand through the air and the Death Eater collapsed. Beside her Harry flung a spell at another Death Eater. The python that shot from the tip of Harry's wand latched its sharp and backwards-curving teeth onto the Death Eater's neck and flung its thick body twice around the man's torso. The man dropped to the ground as the python began to constrict him.

Harry turned away from him just in time to block a curse sent at him by another Death Eater. As the man's blasting hex dissolved against Harry's shield, Hermione threw a "Reducto" at the Death Eater, hitting him in the face.

Neville and Susan ducked under a curse that was thrown at them. Once it had passed, Neville stood and fired a blasting hex at the Death Eater who had sent it their way, striking him in the middle of his chest.

The group continued on, now using fire to blast their way through the Inferi. Along the way they stepped over what might once have been Elphias Doge.

Alastor Moody's magic eye saw several fellow fighters go down, and knew that a wave of stronger wizards was coming towards him. The amount of platinum blond hair coming towards him told him that these were the extended Malfoy clan. He was going to have fun with these bastards.

They attacked him from all sides. He held his staff high and created a spherical shield of magic around himself. Their spells, and there were many of them, were absorbed by this barrier, making it glow brightly, increasing its power. Moody then brought his staff down hard against the ground and a wave of magic pulsed outwards from it, vaporising several of the Malfoys around him, just killing those a little further back and knocking out those further back from them.

Moody then took his wand once again and fired off more lethal spells.

After years of Ministerial reluctance and Dumbledore's foolish belief that every Death Eater deserved a second (and third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh) chance, it felt good to bring these bastards down permanently.

His elation was cut short, however, when a voice to his right roared "Avada Kedavra!"

Yannick Malfoy, current head of the Malfoy family, wore an expression of uncontained glee as his killing curse struck the legendary Alastor Moody in the chest.

That feeling was short lived, however, for Moody did not fall. Instead the battle scarred ex-Auror fixed both his magical eye and his real eye upon the Frenchman and snarled at him before aiming his own wand and snuffing out the bastard's life with a killing curse of his own.

Yannick dropped to the ground, lifeless.

Alastor did not need to wonder how he had survived that curse, he already knew. The locket containing the picture of Agnes had bruised him as it took the impact of the spell. The locket was probably destroyed and the picture along with it, but that didn't matter now.

Moody chuckled under his breath "Still lookin' out for me, eh Agnes?"

He raised his wand and launched another volley of curses into his enemies.

Mad Eye Moody wasn't down yet.

Amelia was fighting hard. She had a good number of wounds now, some of them quite serious, but she wasn't about to give up. Not now.

She launched another barrage of spells at her opponents, and five of them hit their mark.

A glimpse of bright pink hair told her that Tonks was nearby. She had to get to her; they were stronger in numbers.

Lily was weakening, and she knew it. She had given Harry many reassurances that she could handle the number of reanimates that she had made, but that was a lie. Without enough time she hadn't been able to make them as dependant as she would have liked; they certainly were not at the same level as Arnold was, or even Draco. There wasn't much need for them to be; they were just here to fight their enemies, not fool them.

But as a result she had had to alter them. They, unlike Arnold and Draco, were much more dependent on her power to control them. Deep down she knew that it was dangerous to her, especially if the battle went on for too long, but at least Sarah, Serena and Hestia had persuaded her to allow them to control thirty reanimates each. That made it much easier on her, but there was still a major drain on her magic.

Sirius Black was fighting hard, with his wife Emmeline and his friend Remus on either side of him. He wasn't sure where James was. They too had fought their way through the army of Inferi, and had taken on a few Vampires before turning their attention to the Death Eaters.

Now Sirius was locked in a duel with Scabior. Scabior had been facing Kingsley and his men, but made a hasty retreat when he caught sight of Kingsley's true power.

Scabior laughed when his piercing hex got through Sirius' defences and struck him in the left eye, but Sirius was quick to recover, and Scabior's elation cost him dearly.

"Defodio!" Sirius roared.

The gouging spell cut deep chunks out of Scabior's face and the black-hearted crook collapsed to the floor with agony. He would live a painful few minutes before he bled out.

Sirius returned to the fight, but with one eye missing he wasn't as good a shot as he was before and it was only a matter of minutes before he lost his wand hand to a cutting hex.

Emmeline cut down her husband's attacker and several others before Remus took over for her telling her to "Get him the hell outta here!"

She didn't need telling twice. She wanted to get her husband home before more bits could be hacked off of him, and to be honest the blood oozing from a wound on her arm was beginning to look like something to be concerned about.

She forced Sirius' hand onto her portkey and together they left the battlefield behind them.

Remus quickly joined Arthur and Charlie Weasley in their battle against some vicious Werewolves. Remus had long ago lost his sympathy for many of them.

Neville had gotten a little separated from the others. He could still see Harry, Hermione and Luna cutting their way through their foes not too far away to, but he could not get to them. Dean, Seamus,

Parvati and Lavender could also be made out to his right, but again he could not get to them.

He swung his wand around in a wide arc, sending scorching flames into the Inferi around him. And then something truly terrifying happened. A demon came closer; far too close.

Neville knew that Harry was likely to attack the demon in order to save everyone nearby, but he also knew that Harry was needed to defeat Voldemort.

There was only one thing for it; Neville had to beat it before Harry could. He wasn't yet fully recovered from his previous lightning strike spell, but there was nothing for it.

He cast the spell skywards with his wand and then raised his sword. The lightning struck it and Neville aimed. Even as he did so, the demon snatched up a panicking Auror Dawlish, picked him up and bit him in half.

A split second later the Demon was blasted apart by lightning.

'Gotcha, you bastard.' Neville thought, before the world turned dark around him and he collapsed due to magical exhaustion.

Considering that there were still many Inferi nearby, that wasn't such a good thing.

Tonks' forehead was drenched in beads of sweat. Three more of her group were dead now, and the enemy just seemed to keep coming.

She threw another one down, and another, and another.

Then she lost her wand. The disarming spell flicked it from her hand.

She turned and stared at the man that had disarmed her. He wore a maniacal grin on his face, his wand still pointed at her.

Amelia Bones saw this. She tore through her final few opponents and raced forwards.

She'd had a good life really; her only regret was not seeing any grandchildren from Susan.



"Avada Kedavra."

Tonks flinched as the spell raced towards her. She shut her eyes, fearing the end, but seconds later she heard a body hit the ground; a body that wasn't hers.

She opened her eyes and saw Amelia, her boss and mentor, lying in a collapsed heap on the ground. She had taken the killing curse for Tonks.

A renewed strength entered Tonks. She would despair later, for now she took great pleasure in drawing one of her spare wands and first decapitating the Death Eater that had killed her mentor, and then launching deadly spell after deadly spell into her enemies' ranks with a renewed vigour.

This cursed war would end this day.

Susan had seen the lightning strike, and she knew what Neville had done. Hannah's plea came back to her, and, after receiving nods from Padma and Su, she went off to find her best friend's husband.

Hermione's fire-whip cut through the group of Inferi that remained blocking their path. As their bodies, cut clean in two, crumpled to the ground, Harry and Luna let loose a barrage of deadly cutting curses into the Death Eater ranks.

Voldemort was inside the Manor House, and they would get there at all costs.

Sally-Anne had done something very stupid; she had gotten herself separated from the others. She and Fay Dunbar had fought their way through the Inferi horde, only for Fay to be struck by a killing curse. Sally-Anne had destroyed the Death Eater that killed her, along with several of his companions.

Now, however, she faced a larger problem.

Vampires, strong and powerful, were able to take many spells with ease, but there was one that was always guaranteed to kill them

"Lumos solem!"

A beam of light, as bright as the sun, shot from the tip of Sally-Anne's wand and turned several of the Vampires to dust.

She kept the spell going, focusing on killing as many Vampires as possible, which was why she didn't realise that the Inferius was coming until it grabbed her from behind.

Startled, she cancelled her sunlight spell, aimed her wand over her shoulder and blasted the Inferius with a burst of flame. It let go and she spun around to see ten Inferi moving towards her. She blasted the lot of them with fire, but she was caught out once again, this time grabbed by a Vampire.

She felt the pain as two pointed teeth pierced the skin of her neck. She seemed to lose all willpower as the Vampire began to feast on her blood. Her vision quickly began to fade and the world went dark.

With a group of six other Aurors now backing her up, Tonks continued to blast her way through her opponents. Following Amelia's death she didn't have a single drop of mercy left in her, and every shot was aimed to kill.

From her right came Kingsley, leading three others their two groups formed together and began duelling the wizards in front of them. They were the Lestranges, and they fought nasty. But Tonks had good aim, and one of her blasting spells struck the Head of the Lestrangle family in the chest, killing him instantly.

This, thankfully, had a most welcome added effect; the Demons had been summoned by anchoring the senior Lestrangle's soul to them. With his death, the two remaining Demons gave great screams of agony and dissolved into nothingness once more.

The Lestranges responded violently, but Tonks and Kingsley were dangerous warriors, and gave as good as they got.

Susan cast wide-arcing flames against the Inferi, blasting her way through their ranks. Her left arm was hanging limply at her side; a Death Eater had hit her on the shoulder with a piercing hex, but she was not about to let that slow her down.

Another burst of flame from her wand brought down three more Inferi. Then the Inferi that remained before her were blasted apart by a ball of fire. They fell to the ground, and Susan saw the caster. It was Fleur. She was in her Veela form, feathers and all, throwing balls of fire from her hands, torching every Inferius that came her way. With her were her husband Bill and his brothers Fred and George. Their own fire spells were impressive, but nothing compared to what Fleur could do.

Susan hurried over to them.

"Have you seen Neville?" she asked.

"Was he the one who cast that second lightning spell?" asked George.

"Because if it was him, the spell came from that way." said Fred, pointing to his right, Susan's left.

Susan clutched her wand tightly and moved to march off in that direction.

"You ought to get out of here." said Bill "Get that arm seen to."

"Not 'till I find Neville." answered Susan, before launching more fire spells at the Inferi.

Bill, Fleur, Fred and George all followed her.

Lily was in a bad way. She was getting weaker by the second, and a good number of the Rowle family were battling their way closer to her.

All the reanimates under Hestia's control had been destroyed, and she was now free to fight, but she could only hold off so many.

The last few fighters fell, and the Death Eaters charged. Hestia fired off as many spells as she could, and Sarah and Serena risked losing control over their own reanimates to fire off a few spells of their own, but the Death Eaters were too many and one of them, Tormod, head of the Rowle family got too close.

He pointed his wand at Lily and shouted "Avada Ked-"

"Expulso!"

The curse never finished leaving Tormod's mouth, for James Potter's explosion spell blew half of his head off.

James fired off a few more explosion spells to fend off the already fleeing Death Eaters. He looked to Lily and gave her a nod, which she returned, before joining Hestia, standing in front of Lily, Sarah and Serena, ready to take down any opponent who got too close.

James had no idea what Lily's real role in all of this was, though he knew it had something to do with the reanimated Death Eaters.

Their marriage might've been a construct of a meddling old fool, but he would still defend her with his life.

Susan blasted the last few Inferi aside and came upon Neville. He had a few deep wounds where the Inferi had attacked his unconscious form, but nothing too serious.

"Get him out." ordered Bill, before throwing another flame spell into the Inferi.

Susan did not need telling twice. She grabbed a hold of Neville, grasped her portkey, shouted the activation word, and they were gone.

Fleur and the Weasley men focussed their attentions back on the Inferi.

Hannah was at Neville's side immediately, frantically running diagnostic spells over him as Susan explained what had happened.

Finally, after healing his wounds, Hannah gave a satisfied nod and turned to the other healers.

"We need a blood replenisher over here." Tracey snatched one up from a nearby trolley and carried it over.

"Listen, I'm going back to the battle." said Susan, making to leave.

"No you're not." said Hannah, taking her by the good arm and leading her over to a nearby bed "Not till I've gotten a good look at that arm."

Susan complied and sat down. Hannah began examining her shoulder.

"He'll be alright, won't he?" Susan asked after a few moments.

"Yes." replied Hannah "Thanks to you."

The front doors to the Manor exploded inwards from the force with which the Death Eater struck them.

Harry stepped in and blocked the curse from Antonin Dolohov.

Hermione and Luna passed him and engaged Antonin and Macnair in combat.

Harry slipped between both battles and headed onwards in search of Voldemort.

Hagrid had procured a club from one of the fallen Giants that still fought for Voldemort. He had had to break a bit off of it to better suit him, but now he was wielding it quite easily. The head of that last Inferius had shot off like a golf ball off the tee.

Hagrid was fighting alongside the Forest Trolls, crushing every Inferius and Death Eater that came their way with their clubs. Harry's Giants were up ahead, battling Voldemort's Giants. Hagrid had just flattened another Inferius when a bone-rattling bellow told him that one of Voldemort's Giants had broken rank and was charging towards them.

Golgomath, leader of the Giants, was a huge beast with a temper to match. With one fell swing of his club, he brought one of the reanimated Giants crashing down before charging towards the Trolls. So keen to get to them was he that he completely missed Hagrid, who saw his chance. As Golgomath charged by him, Hagrid swung his club with every ounce of his strength, landing a forceful blow onto the back of Golgomath's left knee.

The mighty leader of the Giants stumbled, crashed to the ground and was set upon by the Forest Trolls, each one eager to bash the brute's head in.

Moody was getting tired. A part of him was begging and pleading to give in; to grab the portkey and just get the hell out of there.

But Alastor 'Mad-Eye' Moody wasn't that sort of person.

He had killed many foes, and taken numerous hits. Now it was just a matter of how many more men he would take down before he met his end.

Killing curse after killing curse, explosion hex after explosion hex and cutting spell after cutting spell left his wand at a powerful rate. He wasn't bothering to shield anymore, just blast the bastards apart.

One more Death Eater came at him, and Moody blew him apart.

And then it happened.

The edge of an arcing cutting spell slashed his stomach.

Crying out he bent double with the pain.

There was a scream of his name somewhere nearby.

"Mad Eye!"

That was Tonks.

His magical eye fixed on the one who had hit him.

He pointed his wand and cast his final killing curse.

Tonks used her wand to blast apart those who stood in her way.

Moody stared around dazedly, taking on the battle still going on around him.

A Death Eater behind him got him in the back with a piercing hex.

The air was forced from Moody's lungs and he sank to his knees, his fading vision now seeing all the dead that lay on the ground.

Tonks blasted Moody's killer with a killing curse and then sank to her knees behind her other mentor. She grasped him by the shoulders, and his head fell back onto her shoulder, his eyes unseeing.

Tonks looked up and saw Kingsley looking on with a sad look on his face.

The greatest Auror of recent times had fought his last battle.

Tonks lay Moody gently upon the ground, and then turned her attentions to the snarling Werewolves that were gathering nearby.

Lethal cutting curse after lethal cutting curse were being fired in rapid succession towards Hermione, whose wand was a blur as she deflected every single one. Nearby Luna seemed almost to be dancing as she dodged everything Macnair threw at her.

Antonin Dolohov flicked his wand again and again, growing frustrated as Hermione blocked everything. But then she broke off the chain, spinning to the side to dodge a curse rather than block it. This enabled her to turn the tables and begin firing off one reductor curse after another, this time forcing Dolohov to go on the defensive.

Luna did the same, bringing her wand into play to throw a series of spells at Macnair, all of which the senior Death Eater blocked.

The two pairs were so caught up in their respective duels and none of them noticed four reanimates run by; Draco Malfoy, Severus Snape, Albus Dumbledore and Bellatrix Lestrange. All four of them ran up the central staircase.

Like Antonin, the entire Dolohov family was highly proficient in the art of the cutting spells, which was why they were able to bring down so many opponents without sustaining too many casualties of their own.

That, however, was before Padma Patil and Su Li crossed their paths. Firing off spells with incantations voiced in Indian and Chinese languages rather than the more commonly used Latin gave Padma and Su the advantage that they needed to keep their foes on

guard, so much so that together they cut down five of the Dolohov clan apiece before both turning their wands on the head of the family. His first cutting curse left a deep gouge in the side of Su's face, but he never got to fire a second one as two killing curses impacted his chest at the same time.

Half a second later, Padma suddenly had no wand. It was on the ground, along with her hand and forearm. Her left arm had been cut off at the elbow.

Lavender, the side of her own face blistered from a flame spell grabbed Padma from behind and got her out of there. Su fired off three more curses before Cho, whose face was peppered with many smaller cuts, grabbed her and got her out of there too.

Just a second later half a dozen killing curses crossed paths in the air where Su had been.

Remus had an injury on his leg, but he was determined to not let it slow him down. Beside his Arthur and Charlie Weasley, both of whom had sustained their own injuries, also fought on, and the tide of Werewolves was breaking.

A scream caught their attention, and they turned to see a pink-haired young woman, an Auror by the looks of it, being pinned to the ground by two Werewolves as a third loomed over her.

Kingsley Shacklebolt lay unconscious next to her, bleeding from several deep wounds.

Arthur and Charlie used blasting curses to throw down the two Werewolves that held the Auror down. Remus opted for a more physical approach.

He leapt at the third Werewolf and together they wrestled until Remus pinned him. Then he drew his wand, aimed it between the Werewolf's eyes and cast the piercing hex.

Charlie and Arthur moved off to check on Kingsley as Remus moved to check on Tonks. Charlie, using what healing spells he had learned on the Dragon preserve healed Kingsley's wounds as best as he could, and then Arthur revived him.



"Are you alright?" asked Remus as Tonks got to her feet.

She turned to look at him.

It was love at first sight.

Suddenly there was a loud bang like the sound of cannon fire, followed by the sound of shattering glass and a loud scream.

Tonks, Remus, Arthur, Charlie and Kingsley all turned to look at the manor house. Elsewhere on the battlefield other groups did the same. Hagrid and the Trolls lowered their clubs to gaze in awe. Minerva, Filius, Pomona and Horace lowered their wands. Fleur returned to her normal self, Bill, Fred and George surrounding her. Seamus, Dean, Parvati and Angelina turned their attentions away from defending the bodies of Alicia and Lee.

Lily stopped the flow of her magic, allowing the remaining reanimates to drop to the ground. Sarah and Serena did the same and together they stepped forwards to join Hestia and James.

The manor house was aflame from around the second floor upwards. Black smoke and orange flames filled the night sky.

And a body fell, almost as if in slow motion, from a window and down towards the flames.

It was James who asked the all-important question.

"What's happened?"

A/N: Please don't flame me for the cruel cliff-hanger. I'm not going to keep you waiting long! And don't flame me for killing those that I did, it wasn't easy to choose who would die.

This chapter is almost three times as long as a normal update is for me. What more do you want? :)

I'm not sure where the demons came from, but a part of me just thought; "Sod it, let's go all out! This story has gone randomly off kilter plenty of times before, so what the hell? Go for it!"

I couldn't just introduce those families have just have them be cannon fodder. And anyway, Voldemort's forces needed something to go against the golems.

Anyway, this part of the tale will be ended in the next chapter. Look out for it coming soon!

## Chapter 28: The Name is Harry.

"Avada Kedavra."

That was Barty Crouch Junior's opening move against Harry Potter. Unfortunately for him, it missed by about three feet and slammed harmlessly into a wall, leaving a scorch mark there.

Harry was quick to return fire.

"Reducto."

"Protego."

Harry fired the reductor curse, and Crouch blocked it.

Neither moved for a moment, both instead staring at each other, each one sizing the other up.

"Crucio."

"Lapidem forma."

This time Crouch attacked. Harry simply conjured up a block of stone to shield from the attack.

The spell hit and the block of stone exploded.

Crouch tried again.

"Crucio."

Harry had had enough of this one.

Lapidem forma". Diffindo. Petrificus Totalus. Bombarda. Expelliarmus. Impedimenta. Sectumsempra."

One more conjured block of stone to protect himself, followed by a repeated barrage of spells in an attempt to break Crouch's guard.

Crouch blocked everything but the last, and he fell to the floor screaming in agony as deep slashes opened in his skin.

With a flick of his wand, Harry destroyed Crouch's wand and then turned away to continue his search for Voldemort, leaving Crouch to die of his wounds.

But Crouch wasn't down yet. He drew from within his robes a sharp dagger and threw it. Due to his injuries, Crouch's aim was off, and it pierced Harry's calf muscle, which was nowhere near his spine, which is what Crouch had hoped to hit.

Gritting his teeth against the pain, Harry reached down and pulled the dagger out of his leg and then used his wand to banish it back at Crouch. It wedged itself deep into Crouch's forehead.

Harry used a quick healing spell to seal the wound and then continued on.

He was a little disappointed with himself; that was such a stupid mistake to make, and it had nearly cost him dearly.

He would have to make sure to make no mistakes like that when he faced Voldemort.

Lord Voldemort stood staring out through the large window, viewing the epic battle being waged below.

Despite everything, his forces seemed to be losing. All of the Demons had fallen, as had the head of the Houses of Malfoy, Lestrangle and Rowle. Many of the Inferi, Werewolves and Vampires now lay dead, and many of Voldemort's marked men too.

Voldemort watched as the leader of his Giants, Golgomath, broke ranks and charged towards the line of battling Forest Trolls, only to be brought down by the half-giant oaf Hagrid.

He turned his eyes away, instead focussing on the Dolohov family. Ten of them were cut down, followed by the head of their family.

Voldemort scoffed in derision. To think that so many supposedly able wizards of good, pure-blooded stock could fall that easily in battle was disgusting to him. The Mudbloods, Halfbloods, Halfbreeds and beasts that fought them ought to be cowering before them, feeling honoured to share the same world as them, not slaughtering them so... easily.

It was enough to make Voldemort feel sick to his stomach.

But this was no time to head outside and show his remaining minions how things should be done; the Potter brat was somewhere in the building, coming for Voldemort even now, confident in the belief that he could defeat the greatest Dark Sorcerer of all time.

Voldemort was ready to rob him of that notion, as well as his life.

Harry walked along a darkened corridor. The leg that had been pierced by the dagger was stinging a bit, but Harry put that out of his mind. Instead he raised his wand and cast quietly

"Homenum Revelio."

A smirk formed on Harry's face.

Third door to the left.

He approached cautiously, his holly and phoenix feather wand raised.

Footsteps behind him drew his attention and he turned quickly, a curse about to escape his mouth when he realised who it was; the reanimated corpses of Draco Malfoy, Severus Snape, Bellatrix Lestrange and Albus Dumbledore.

Harry raised his hand and placed a finger against his lips, telling them to keep silent. Their minimal intelligence was enough to allow them to understand this. They each nodded and raised their wands.

Harry turned back to the door and slowly reached for the handle.

This was it.

The door clicked and opened, causing Voldemort to turn his attention away from the door.

There, in the doorway, stood his nemesis, wand in hand, ready for battle.

Voldemort drew his own wand and stared at his foe.

"Arnold Potter, The-Boy-Who-Lived. Come to die."

"It will not be my death but yours that occurs here tonight." answered Harry.

"You sound confident, Arnold Potter." said Voldemort "And yet here you are, all alone, as you face me."

Harry tilted his head to the side and asked in a curious tone "What makes you think that I am alone?"

At that, the other four stepped into the room; Dumbledore and Snape on Harry's right, Bellatrix and Draco on Harry's left.

Voldemort's eyes widened with surprise, but they also showed anger, and more than a little fear.

Harry smirked "It's amazing how easily we all lured you into a false sense of security. The death of me, Arnold Potter, followed up by Dumbledore's death and Snape's death really made you get overconfident real quick. You arrogantly assumed that you could get everyone to roll over and beg for mercy with the slightest show of power once you thought that both I and Dumbledore had died. And that arrogance cost you, didn't it?"

"The assassination attempt on Hermione Granger was a setup to get Snape in position to fake his own death and Dumbledore's whilst getting rid of one of your biggest sympathisers in the Ministry as well as a couple of Death Eaters. We knew once that had happened, you'd want revenge. You are, after all, so predictable. You went after Longbottom Manor, and how did that work out for you? How about the assault on the village of Puddletown? And then the Battle of Hogsmeade? Faking Bellatrix' death there caused you to make mistakes in your battle with me, what with you believing her to be your best lieutenant and all."

Harry took great pleasure in manipulating the story to fudge with Voldemort's mind.

"So it was all a trick?" asked Voldemort, his tone suggesting that he was barely keeping from blasting Harry apart with every violent hex

he knew "Well we will just have to see how tricky you can be, won't we, Arnold Potter?"

He raised his wand

"Avada Kedavra."

Harry already had his wand ready to counter.

"Reducto."

Both curses met and the two wands locked. Harry gave a theatrical yawn and the two wands fought to see who was stronger.

Bellatrix raised her wand and, with a maniacal laugh that wasn't quite of her trademark standard she cast "Crucio"

The effects of Priori Incantatem ended as Voldemort's concentration broke during the effects of the torture curse.

After a few moments, Bellatrix released the curse and Voldemort slumped slightly, breathing heavily.

"What's the matter Tom Riddle?" asked Harry "Isn't this how you usually face your opponents; five-on-one?"

Voldemort didn't answer directly. Instead he thrust his wand towards Bellatrix and sent a spell at her that threw her through the wall behind her.

Following that the other three reanimates sprang into action.

Harry stood back as Voldemort took on Dumbledore, Snape and Draco. Voldemort seemed to have the upper hand, but then Harry added another trick into the mix.

He pointed his wand at Dumbledore and incanted

"Viribus."

The incantation meant "give strength" and that is exactly what the spell did. Harry felt a slight drain on his power, but it was worth it to

make Voldemort work harder. Harry cast the spell twice more, once of Draco and once on Snape.

Now he waited.

"Protego! Protego! Duro!"

Hermione had been kept up her shielding and dodging for longer than usual this time. So long, in fact, that when her retaliating shot came, Antonin Dolohov did not expect it.

In the blink of an eye Dolohov was turned to stone. A reductor curse blew him apart.

Walden Macnair, meanwhile, had gotten pretty sick of Luna's constant deflections and dodgings of his curses and decided to just toast the bitch.

"Fiendfyre!"

Unfortunately for Macnair, Luna was better than he gave her credit for. She drew her sword and slashed it downwards through the air, creating a blade of magic that forced the hell fire to part before her. A wave of her sword caused the fire to swirl around her and then sweep back towards Macnair.

The Death Eater never stood a chance.

The flames, however, were strong; very strong.

Using her sword, Luna fought to obtain and keep control of the evil flames.

"Luna," Hermione called out to her "Can you hold them?"

"I think so." Luna called back "You go help Harry."

Hermione nodded and turned to run up the staircase. At the top she turned to send one last worried look at Luna and then hurried on to find Harry.

"Please hurry." Luna silently begged. She didn't know how long she could hold the flames back.



The black pulse of magic enveloped Draco, trapping him in a sphere of black energy. Moments later, however, that energy faded into nothing, and all that was left of Draco Malfoy was his skeleton.

Voldemort laughed madly as the bones fell into a heap on the floor, but that laughter ended when a cutting spell from Snape left a slash across his face.

Voldemort returned fire with a blasting hex, which Snape shielded against as Dumbledore fired a ball of flame, which hit Voldemort in his chest, setting his robes alight.

In one movement of his wand Voldemort extinguished those flames and then set about displaying a powerful offensive.

Voldemort, ever the exhibitionist, had decided that Arnold Potter would witness the 'real' deaths of Dumbledore and Snape before meeting his own end.

Harry meanwhile was using the time given to him wisely.

Voldemort hadn't noticed it, but as had happened during the Battle of Hogsmeade, Harry had a power sapping spell pinned on Voldemort. As it was not in effect during Priori Incantatem, this time the spell was invisible as it slowly siphoned power from Voldemort and into Harry.

Voldemort would feel the drain soon.

Harry knew that there were two ways to win a wand duel; the first was to get in a lucky shot, the second was to wear your opponent down.

Harry was wearing Voldemort down whilst powering up himself. Of course, if the chance to get in a lucky shot came about, Harry would take it.

For now though, it was a matter of waiting, and trying to ignore the prickling sensation in his leg that seemed to be getting worse.

Luna had by now retreated to the second floor. Usually spells wore off when the caster died, but fiendfyre was different. It ran wild until it

ran out of things to burn. For the one who cast it, fiendfyre was difficult to control. For anyone else, such a feat was near impossible.

Luna knew that probably most of the ground floor and first floor was ablaze now. The best that she could hope to achieve was to prevent it rising up too high, though that might be a pointless exercise should the walls of the ground floor burn away, leaving the upper levels with nothing supporting them.

Voldemort threw out a spell which formed into a purple blade. Severus Snape hit the ground in two halves.

Harry drew his sword as Dumbledore got Voldemort with a dizzying charm.

Disorientated, Voldemort looked around, trying to focus.

Harry grinned; lucky shot indeed.

He banished the sword forwards and it slammed into Voldemort, piercing through him right where his heart should have been.

That made Voldemort focus. He put his hands together and pulled them wide apart, sending out a powerful pulse of magic as he did so. Harry shielded, but Dumbledore was thrown back through the door.

The flames came racing towards her from one end of the corridor. She turned, only to see more coming at her from the other end.

Closing her eyes, Luna mutters "I'm sorry Harry" before grabbing her portkey and getting out of there. She didn't like abandoning the fight, but she knew that Harry would like things even less if she died.

Harry's leg was really hurting now, and although he had shielded himself from the pulse of magic, his head was getting a little fuzzy.

Not good.

He aimed and fired a disarming spell, tearing Voldemort's wand from his grasp and then approached the Dark Lord, who was doing what he did best; ranting about how great he thought he was.

"...I have travelled further down the path to true greatness than anyone! I am immortal! I cannot be beaten..."

(You get the idea).

"Oh shut the fuck up." said Harry, placing his hand on the hilt of his sword. It was only Voldemort's magic that was keeping the body alive.

"I am unbeatable!" Voldemort continued to rage "I am more powerful than Albus Dumbledore could ever have hoped to have been! I have accomplished more than Gellert Grindelwald! I will not die at the hands of Arnold Potter!"

"Well it's a good thing my name is Harry then, isn't it?" asked Harry before jabbing the Elder Wand into Voldemort's chest, above the sword and shouting

"Everte Statum!"

Voldemort was thrown backwards off of the sword, through the glass window and down with a scream. A hole broke open in the wall below and a flaming serpent erupted out from it and upwards, opening its mouth to swallow Voldemort whole.

Harry felt a sense of relief wash over him.

This was followed by a wave of nausea.

Already his adrenalin levels were beginning to drop, and suddenly he felt much weaker. The room seemed to be spinning. His leg hurt more than he had realised.

It was getting warm.

His leg gave out and he collapsed.

The floor was very warm.

Hermione had been making her way along the darkened corridors, trying to decipher the sounds of Harry's battle with Voldemort from the sounds of battle outside.

Then a loud scream caused her to do a complete one-eighty and hurry off in the opposite direction.

She could feel it getting warmer and warmer.

Through an open door she could see flames flickering outside a window.

She hoped Luna was okay.

Eventually she caught sight of the body of Barty Crouch Jr.

A little further on, she saw the body of Albus Dumbledore lying in a crumpled heap on the floor outside an open door. Bellatrix lay alongside him. It looked like she had been blasted through the wall.

She entered the room. The big window opposite her was smashed open, and flames were now burning the frames and the curtains. Flames were also burning a hole in the floor nearby.

Hermione spotted Harry's crumpled form and hurried across the room to him. She gathered him in her arms, grabbed his two wands and his sword and then reached for her portkey.

There was a great creak, followed by a crunching sound and then with a lot of noise half of the room disappeared down to the lower levels. Scorching flames came roaring through. The head of a great flaming dragon reared up before them as if to attack, but a second later the pair were gone.

The flaming dragon's head crashed itself down onto the spot where they had been, and a massive part of the wall gave out, collapsing inwards. As the wall fell so too did the floor above, and the one above that.

Those outside stood watching as the entire manor house collapsed in on itself to be consumed by the fire.

Then there was a clap of thunder, and it started to rain.

A/N: There we go, not an epic battle as such, just Harry finishing what was started in Hogsmeade. He made a mistake when fighting Crouch though, how will that pan out for him?

Note - Chapter updated to sort a crucio-protego error.

## Chapter 29: It Is Over

"I-I can't do it." Daphne whined, her hand shaking.

Hermione grabbed it "Daphne, look at me."

Daphne met Hermione's eyes.

"You can do this. Harry knows you can. That's why you were left behind."

Daphne nodded and held her wand with a steadier grip "Tracey, Hannah, I'm gonna need your help here."

The moment the portkey had arrived, Hermione had found herself and Harry being swept into Luna's embrace.

Quickly they had gotten Harry onto a bed and Daphne had come hurrying over. Her diagnostic charms had quickly found the source of the problem; a deadly poison was flooding Harry's bloodstream. She had managed to trace its origin to a hastily healed cut in Harry's leg. Further inspection revealed the cut to actually be a very deep wound.

Daphne was not able to get a good read on what exactly the poison was, but a bezoar was soon neutralising it. Once that had begun happening, Daphne had been able to confirm that all of the poison's damage could be reversed.

Well, almost all of it.

Harry's left leg, from just below his knee and down was coloured black, purple and blue and was swollen. Several large blisters had opened in the skin, and puss along with blood that was more like mud than anything else was oozing out of these.

The muscles and veins in the lower part of Harry's left leg were too far gone to be rescued.

So that was why Daphne was panicking. She had administered potions and antidotes to many people before now, and had healed up many a wound. But now she found herself having to actually

disfigure someone. The fact that that person was Harry made this far worse.

But Hermione was right; Daphne could do this. She had to.

It had been the job of Luna, Hermione, Padma, Su and Sally-Anne to get Harry home. After that his well-being was Daphne's responsibility, no matter what that meant.

At her call, Hannah and Tracey handed already on-the-mend their patients over to others and then hurried over to assist.

Forcing her hand to stop shaking, Daphne pressed the tip of her wand to Harry's leg, just above the knee and cast her spell.

"Diffindo."

A couple of blackbirds were singing outside the window. A bright sun shone through the glass pane, coming to land on the face of a man in his early thirties.

Harry Potter stirred and woke up.

His vision was blurry. He wondered where he was.

And why did he feel like crap?

Realising that he was lying down, Harry moved to push himself up.

"Easy, Harry." said a voice as two pairs of hands moved to help him sit upright.

His glasses were placed on his face, and the world came into focus.

There were a lot of people gathered around his bed, each of them with a relieved smile on their face.

To his left was Luna. She was the one that had put his glasses onto his face. Next to her was Padma, and next to her was Su.

On his right was Hermione. She was the one who spoke. Next to her was Daphne, and next to her was Tracey.

Gathered around the rest of the bed were Lily, Sarah, Serena, Hestia, Narcissa, Neville, Hannah, Susan, Dean, Seamus, Lavender, Parvati, Cho, and Ernie.

"How're you feeling Harry?" asked Lily.

Harry took a deep breath, let it out again and answered "Weak and numb, but not in pain. How long have I been out?"

"A week." answered Luna.

Harry looked at her, his eyes wide with surprise.

"And the battle?" he asked.

"Don't worry Harry." said Hermione "We won."

"We did?"

"Yes. Once you threw Voldemort out of the window, most of his remaining followers threw down their wands. They're all awaiting trial, though we did have to destroy the last of the Inferi." explained Seamus.

Harry nodded, but then noticed something; someone was missing.

"Where's Sally-Anne?"

The door opened with a slight creak. Harry stared down the darkened steps into the gloom below.

"Sally-Anne?" he called out.

There was no reply.

He took a step forward and began to descend the staircase, trying to ignore the clunking sound that accompanied his every other step now, thanks to the artificial leg now attached to him. Hermione, Luna, Su and Daphne accompanied him. He had wanted to go alone, but he wasn't used to his fake leg yet.

Reaching the bottom of the staircase was more tiring for Harry than it should have been, but he knew that he'd get used to it in time.



At the base of the stairs, Harry came to a stop and peered through the gloom again.

"Sally-Anne?" he called out again.

"Harry?" a voice asked in reply.

Harry turned and moved towards the source of the noise.

He just barely got a glimpse of her before she darted backwards, retreating further into the darkness, away from him.

"Don't look at me." she cried.

Harry drew his wand and incanted

"Lumos Minima."

A very dim light, at only about a quarter of the strength of the usual wand-lighting charm, emitted from the tip of Harry's wand.

It wasn't much, but it was enough.

Sally-Anne stood there, backed up against the wall, looking both frightened and distraught at the same time. Her eyes narrowed slightly, her pupils wide. Her skin was very pale, and she was slightly taller than Harry remembered.

And she had two long pointed teeth in her top jaw.

Harry stepped closer, but still she shied away from him. But Harry moved quickly, so quickly that he nearly fell due to his fake leg, and grabbed a hold of her and pulled her into a hug that was both comforting and protecting.

Sally-Anne broke down completely and cried into his shoulder, trying all the while to ignore the sound of Harry's blood pumping through his system.

Sally-Anne Perks had become a vampire, and as far as Harry Potter was concerned, that mattered not one jot.

Padma, whose hand Daphne had managed to regrow, unlike Harry's leg, Su, whose scar on the side of the face had been healed, but would remain as a faint line forever, and Daphne all made their way over to join the hug.

Hermione turned to Luna with a slightly exasperated look on her face.

"Harry's got himself a bloody harem whether I want him to or not, doesn't he?"

Luna smirked "Well, at least you'll get to be Alpha." she said before moving in to join the group hug as well.

Hermione just shook her head and moved to join in as well.

The Wizarding World would take one hell of a long time to rebuild, but with the new tough stances on Death Eaters and Dark Lord Sympathisers, the world would ultimately be rebuilt far better.

Cornelius Fudge decided to step down as Minister. He had wanted to for quite some time, but someone, usually Dumbledore, had always, somehow persuaded him to stay on. Harry and many others had their own theories on Dumbledore's reasoning for that, but the truth would probably never be known.

There were many calls from all quarters for Harry to step up and become Minister, but Harry had no desire for such things. Instead Wizarding Britain voted en masse for his personal recommendation; Neville Longbottom.

Neville did not find that very amusing, but accepted his role once Harry promised to help him in the role; being an advisor to the Minister allowed Harry to implement a few of the changes he wanted, whilst generally staying out of the limelight.

And, fortunately, Neville had to more very good advisors, in the form of his wives, Hannah and Susan. Harry wasn't quite sure just how that happened, though Hannah mentioned something about Luna having very good ideas. The death of her aunt Amelia had hurt Susan deeply, Hannah and Neville had been there for her and things just evolved.

Once those arrested were thrown into Azkaban, Harry and Neville had gone together to face a foe not as powerful as Voldemort, but far more corrupt;

The International Confederation of Wizards.

Harry and Neville's argument was a simple one;

"Some of your most well respected and wealthy families funded and actively fought for an organisation that tried to obtain control over Wizarding Britain in a hostile takeover. Pay us reparations, or we're gonna cause trouble for you."

(That wasn't how they said it, but you get the gist.)

Naturally protestations against this occurred, with the Russian delegate speculating loudly just how much of a threat Wizarding Britain would be in its current state.

In response, Harry took a small stone from his pocket. He enlarged it and activated the charms and runes.

The fire golem roared into life, causing the delegates to scramble back against the far wall in fear.

Neville stepped around the fire golem and held up a rolled up piece of parchment.

"This," he said "is the document signed by former British Minister for Magic Eldritch Diggory. This document was signed just before Britain began to help in the war against Grindelwald. In exchange for Britain getting involved in a war that was not effecting it, the countries requesting their aid agreed to come to Britain's aid should the need arise. This agreement was signed by France, Germany, Russia, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Switzerland, Norway, Greece, Italy and many other countries besides."

Harry stepped forwards "Wizarding Britain has since fought two wars with Lord Voldemort, the first war lasting around a decade, the second nearly two decades. Both times we made repeated pleas for you to honour this agreement, and every pleas fell on deaf ears, well listen now and listen good; in our eyes you have broken our

agreement, so here is how it is going to be; you will pay us reparations, or we will take the actions of the Malfoys, the Lestranges, the Dolohovs, the Rowles, the Karkaroffs, and many others as declarations of war by your countries. And trust me; if it comes to that, we will crush you just like we did the Death Eaters, is that clear?"

As if to emphasise that point, the fire golem gave a mighty roar that shook the walls of the room they were in.

Britain got its money. And it was a good thing too. Not twenty years later, the Wizarding people from several countries throughout Europe and Asia came under siege from a dark force. With the issue settled, Neville and Harry were happy to provide aid, but that's a whole other story.

Hermione's parents were brought back home, and as promised, Harry and Hermione had their Muggle-style wedding. The elder Grangers were a bit bemused by the fact that Harry had a harem at first, but eventually just accepted it as another odd quirk of the Wizarding world. Hermione had tried insisting that it was not normal, but then Neville turned up, with Hannah and Susan on each arm, and Hermione's argument fell flat.

Harry officially married the rest of them the following year.

James and Lily's separation was made official, and Lily and Sarah officially got together, with Serena, Hestia and Narcissa being frequent 'visitors'.

Sally-Anne eventually got over the fact that she was a vampire. Harry and the others cared about her just the same, and Daphne and Su were able to devise more than one way for a Vampire to move about in daylight.

Many a Hogwarts teacher retired following the war as well, allowing room for newer staff to move in. Daphne took over the role as Potions professor from Horace Slughorn, Padma took over the instruction of Care of Magical Creatures from Hagrid, who wanted to reduce his duties now that he was getting older, and Hermione did decide to return to teach Muggle Studies when Lily announced her decision to take over History of Magic.

Tracey, Cho, Ernie and Astoria all went on to marry Muggles.

Remus and Tonks got together and eventually married. Tonks was offered the role as Head of the DMLE and she took it, but only for as long as it took to get the Ministry back on its feet. She wanted to have a family.

Sirius did get his hand regrown, though his eye was a different matter.

In the end Ginny gave birth to a son, one that James doted on. Harry decided to get to know his father and his friends, and found that he liked them well enough, though he dreaded to think how he would've turned out had he been raised by James.

It was on an outing to a pub that, whilst James was in the toilet, Neville brought up something that Harry had wondered about "What was James' relationship with Ginny?"

Sirius reply was a good one "It's one of those things in life; you're quite desperate to know the answer, but you are also fairly certain that you are happier not knowing."

Despite everything, there was one thing that Harry wanted most of all; to go back to his cottage and live quietly.

There was, however, an issue with that plan; it's called having six wives and too many kids to count.

In the end, Harry sold the cottage and moved the small farm to the grounds of the manor. That end result suited everyone and one person in particular; Holly Pearson, the girl Mad-Eye Moody had rescued from The Spiny Serpent. Once she had been given the all clear by St. Mungo's, Hannah had taken Luna's advice and brought her to Harry's manor house, and she had been running around the place ever since.

One pouting look from all six of his wives left Harry with no option but to agree to adopt her.

And in the end, all was well.

A/N: Bit of a naff ending, I know, but this was the best I could come up with; "In the end, Harry and his friends were alright." Who doesn't want that ending? I should probably work on my endings though, I like to round everything off, but it never seems to come out right.

And before anyone asks, that whole "But that's a whole other story" bit is not, I repeat NOT a hint at an impending sequel. I am done with this one.

It's been a fun ride.

Thanks for reading.

No, this isn't an update, nor is it a message about a sequel. Its just me reflecting upon the story and what I have gained from it. You don't have to read this if you don't want to.

### Author's Final Thoughts.

Well there we go. I wrote a story that had a word count of over 100,000, and also went on for more than twenty-five chapters. Yikes.

But in the experiance of writing this story over the past eight months, what have I, as the author, learned?

Well, I can actually write pretty good battle scenes, according to reviewers. That is something that surprises me, even though it shouldn't if I think about it. I have never been one to watch war films, per say. Films set during WW1, WW2, the Vietnam War etc have never appealed to me. Must be soming to do with the guns and tanks I suppose. However, something with wizards battling it out at wandpoint, like Deathly Hallows part 2, or men and elves firing projectiles from bows and catapults, like the Lord of the Rings trilogy are battle sequences that I could happily spent hours and hours watching over and over again, so somewhere along the line I must have picked up a way to effectiively visualise battles effectively, something I know several authors have claimed they are unable to do.

Opposite to that, I think my weakest point is character development. Over the course of the story, several arcs of character story went well, such as Lily and Harry. My trouble is that I don't usually take the time to focus on what a person is thinking or feeling during particular moments. Towards the end of the story I did get better at this, and certainly no one has really complained about it, but for some reason it never felt like enough to me, no matter how hard I tried. It is probably for that reason that I am not the sort of person who can churn out chapters that are eleven-to-twelve thousand words long, and I might never be either. But then I guess that's the key to writing a story; write the amount you are comfortable with.

To be honest, this story twisted and turned to become something way beyond my original goal, thankfully many people enjoyed the ride, but keeping the story from trailing off dramatically is probably something I should work on. Luckily most of the changes worked out

favourably, but as I said, this story is nowhere near what I originally set out to right.

I was relatively new to writing fanfiction when I started this (and I still am), my experiences from getting reviews for this thing really opened my eyes. For the most part, many people were highly supportive, I'll not name those who were with this story from start to end, but you know who you are, and I heartily thank you.

There were three points in this story where I lost a good number of readers. The first instance was my revealing of Harry's relationship with Luna before I revealed Harry's relationship with Hermione. Some people really hated me for that, and that really was my first taste of truly hateful reviews. Some of them did hurt, but that was more because I knew what was coming in the story, and these people were not willing to read that far. I learned my lesson about listing the pairings in the summary there and then.

The second was when I revealed the truth about Arnold Potter. Some people just could not get their heads around the idea that Lily created what was essentially an advanced Inferius. A good number of people dropped the story at that point.

If you have come this far then obviously that means you know the point in the story that triggered the most hateful reviews and the point where I lost many readers. I do not for one second regret my decision to describe Wizarding America the way I did. I fully expected for there to be hateful reviews, even though I explained my reasonings the best I could. What really shocked me though was how supportive of the idea many people were. I was starting to think that I was alone in being fed up with the, in my opinion, over-used plot device wherein the Muggle-technology-using American wizards fly in to save the day (I know of several stories where the story quickly died after such a plot device was used). But the positive responses outweighed the negatives, which is why I don't regret adding that little twist.

Furthermore, I came to realise something else. Many of those leaving reviews critical of the idea had not (rather obviously) actually read that part of the story properly. I kept getting things thrown at me like America's anti-slavery laws and the Civil-Rights movement thrown at me as reasons why I my idea was wrong. These people obviously missed the part where it is stated that Wizarding America



grew separately from Muggle America. For the most part, the Wizards ignored the Muggles, except to steal Muggleborns, and as such the Civil-Rights movement, amongst other things, was something that they were unconcerned with and therefore did not affect them.

One review for that chapter, and I'll not name names, really did scare me. Nothing threatening, I assure you, but it worried me so much that it made me scared, for the reviewer claimed this in their review: "... Americans have always fought against slavery." Really? Can every American honestly say, hand on their heart, that their country has always fought against slavery? So there has never been a slave in America has there? Hmm...

Some reviewers seemed to be under the impression that America is the only country in the world to have an army, and the only one to use surveillance equipment. That's quite a scary notion.

Also, Americans, I don't mind you being patriotic, I say go for it, but patriotic-bordering-on-racist is not a good thing.

That said, I'm not sure if I'll do the "America has Muggleborns for slaves" thing again, as I am a little fed up arguing the point, though a day may come when I use it again. Does this mean that the next time Americans crop up in one of my stories they'll be portrayed in the same, overused way that they often are in Harry Potter fanfiction? Nope.

Of the numerous story ideas currently running around in my brain, trying to get themselves developed, only two contain Americans, and they ain't gonna come off looking too good. One idea is essentially a long series of many linked one-shots looking into various events concerning Harry's life as an Auror, and his relationships with his (eventually ex) wife Ginny, his Auror partner Susan, his healer friend Daphne, his friend and coworker Hermione, and his source of constant source of headaches: Ron, as well as Harry's kids, nieces and nephews, and a host of others. The idea is for at least one chapter to contain a group of visiting American Aurors, who turn up at the request of the ICW to help monitor things in Britain, as part of an ongoing program following the war with Voldemort. Harry's irritated with these repeated sessions (having already endured French, German, Australian and Canadian Aurors (to name but a few). Things then go badly wrong when Harry is not

listened to when he says that the American Aurors' Muggle Weaponry won't work in Hogsmeade. Following that, Harry is dragged before the ICW for an inquest that might very well ruin his life.

The second idea involves a Harry that is disillusioned with human kind. After getting some new friends, Harry wages war in Europe. Then America comes running in to offer assistance, earning Harry's ire in the process. To give you some more idea as to what this story is about, I'll say that it is linked to the supposed 2012 event that is meant to signal the end of the world (or something) and will be called Harry Potter and the Court of Magical Brethren. Some of you might be able to guess where I go with that.

Anyway, I'd have to say that the most important thing I have learned in the process of writing this story is this: we need to be able to write longer summaries for our stories, because unless I can write out everything that happens in bullet-point form for the summary, there are always going to be people who hate what they read.

On that note, Damn Wizards is my next project to finish, and I expect that Harry Potter and the Court of Magical Brethren will start up during that time.

Anyway, see you next time.

sprinter1988